

## ABSTRACT

Religion in Contemporary China

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Different from many societies that religion is embedded in the cultural tradition and is supported or subsidized by the state, religion in China is marginalized by the Confucian tradition and regulated by the atheist government. Yet, religion in China has been thriving dramatically over the past four decades along with unprecedented modernization process. Why is religion thriving in China? What effect will religion bring to this society? How do this society react to religious minorities? Driven by these questions, this project is organized by three independent studies on religion in China.

Theoretically, the first study revisits and updates the life deprivation theory. Specifically, there are three mechanisms linking life strains and religious involvement: searching for materialistic benefits, increasing existential security, and coping with emotional deprivation. While the former two approaches have been widely explored, the later one has long been discarded due to limitations of method and data. Using Lagged Dependent Variable models on the China Family Panel Study, this study provides support for the subjective deprivation approach. By controlling for previous wave of religiosity,

this study found that experiencing life strains increases religious involvement and subjective deprivation is a significant mediator.

The second study examines the moral community thesis in the secular context of China. Using multilevel logistic regression, this chapter tests (1) whether both individual-level and aggregate-level religiosity are inversely related to law and rule violations at the individual level and (2) whether provincial-level religiosity enhances the inverse relationship between individual religiosity and deviant behaviors. Results show that both individual- and aggregate-level religiosity are inversely related to the odds of violating the law and rules of authorities.

Finally, I investigate religious tolerance in China. Deriving from two competing perspectives—education as liberation and education as socialization—this chapter examines the relationship between education and religious tolerance in China, using the 2010 Wave of China General Social Survey. Results from multiple regressions indicate that education in China only increases religious tolerance on a general level and in private life. In contrast, educational attainment is correlated with less tolerance of religion in the public and political spheres.

Keywords: Religion; China; Conversion; Moral Community; Religious Tolerance

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## CHAPTER ONE

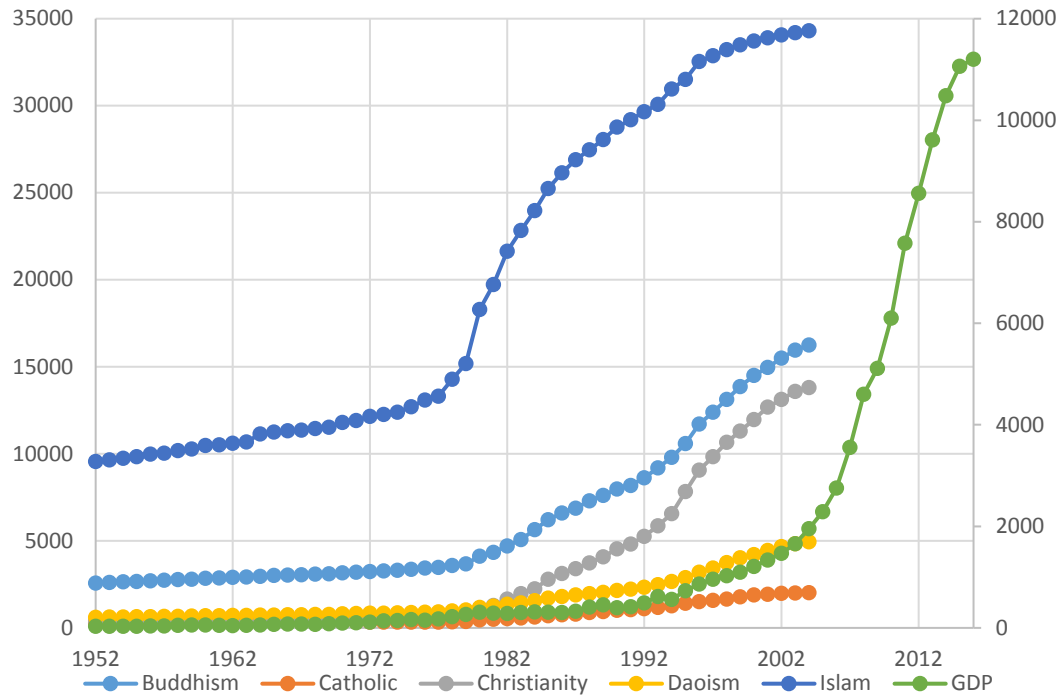
### Introduction to Sociological Study of Religion in China

One lingering question since the birth of sociology concerns the fate of religion in the modern world. Many sociologists assert that religion would disappear along with the development of industry, rationalization and differentiation of social structure (Bruce 2002; Comte 1880; Inglehart 1997; Marx 1976; Wilson 1966). Other scholars argue that religious influence is destined to shrink in modern society even if it does not disappear altogether (Berger 2011; Luckmann 1990; Weber 1958). These “secularization” paradigms are challenged by new schools of thinking and numerous empirical studies (Warner 1993).

The first challenge comes from the rational choice theory, which argues that religion can continue to thrive in modern society (Finke and Stark 2005; Iannaccone, Finke, and Stark 1997). Specifically, the religious economies theory holds that the overall religiosity of a society depends on the supply of religious products rather than the demand from social members. Thus in a competitive religious market, religiosity would increase as religious organizations develop various forms of religious products to maximize the market capacity.

The second challenge comes from empirical findings showing that religion is thriving beyond Europe, in such places as post-communist societies, and African and Latin American countries (Davie 2013; Froese 2008; Gill 2008; Stark 2015; Yang 2011). In addition, most empirical studies find that religion plays a vivid role in increasing

subjective well-being, mental health and decreasing crime and deviance in modern societies (Ellison 1991; Hackney and Sanders 2003; Johnson and Jang 2011).



*Figure 1.1.* Number of Religious Sites and total GDP (\$1000,000,000) in China (1952-2004)

However, there are several issues that remain unresolved about religion in modern society. One question is why religion is thriving in a regulated and quickly modernizing society—China. Since the launch of the Reform and Opening Up in 1978, religion has been growing in China. Not only traditional local religions such as folk religions, Buddhism and Taoism are reviving, but also Christianity and Islam are active (Bays 1999; Goossaert and Palmer 2011; Stark and Wang 2015; Wang and Yang 2006). Besides, many studies are showing that more and more people are converting to underground churches and new cults (Chan 2004; Yu 2010). Based on data released by

Michigan University, the number of officially-registered religious sites drastically increases after 1978 (See Figure 1.1). In 1975, there were only 3,366 religious sites, while in 2000 there were 14,506 religious sites all over China. And the number continues to grow in recent year allying with the GDP growth.

Theoretically, both secularization arguments and the rational choice hypotheses predict that religion should not thrive in a modern highly regulated religious economy. According to the secularization thesis, modernization and industrialization would provide existential security and public welfare for social members thus to take the place of religious role in traditional society (Berger 2011; Berman 1998; Inglehart 1997). The religious economies perspective indicates that only in a competitive religious market are religious organizations able to compete with each other and provide various religious product for individuals. Consequently, in a regulated society, there would be a shortage of religious supply because of political regulation and persecution on religious organizations (Iannaccone et al. 1997; F. Yang 2010).

Based on rational choice theory, Yang developed a triple-market model to explain religious change in China. This model posits that there are three religious markets in a regulated society—a red market supported by the government, a black market banned by the government and a grey market with ambiguous status. When religious regulation declines after 1978, many religious members turn from black market and grey market to red market to practice their religion. Thus religious revival in China comes not from the increase of religiosity, but from more people affirming their religious affiliations (Yang 2006).

Decline of religious regulation appears to be only a part of the social changes proving seedbed for religious prosperity in China. Besides from many people became openly religious, many studies show that many nonreligious people convert after the Economic Reform in 1978. Religious conversion, happens not only in rural areas, but also in urban area and among high educated people (Bays 1999; Rongping Ruan, Wang Xiuhua, and Fengtian Zheng 2016; Stark and Wang 2014; Yang 2005; Zheng, Ruan, and Liu 2010). Therefore, more explanations from the increase of religious demand in China are needed.

A second question concerns the social function of religion in a regulated society. While the social effects of religion have been widely studied in the western societies, the effect of religion in post-communist China remains obscured. Current empirical studies based on Western societies suggest that religious identity and religious community are important mechanisms to shape prosocial behavior and attitudes. For example, religion can increase subjective well-being, mental health, general trust, and decrease crime and deviance (Cheung and Yeung 2011; Ellison 1991; Jang and Johnson 2003; Kelly et al. 2015; Koenig 2012a, 2012b; Lim and Putnam 2010). At the same time, many scholars speculate that religion is not able to play such a significant role shaping prosocial behaviors and prosocial attitudes in a regulated society (Elliott and Hayward 2009; Grim and Finke 2010; Hayward and Elliott 2014). Among the few studies examining the social effect of religion in China, the findings are mixed. Some suggest that religion have no effect on prosocial behaviors, while some do found the significance of religious role (Hu 2013; Lu and Gao 2016; Wang and Jang 2016; Wang, Koenig, and Al Shohaib 2015).

More empirical studies are needed to examine and explain the social effect of religion in a regulated society.

A third question pertains to how religion is treated in an authoritarian regime that on one hand strives to make China the most modernized country in the world but on the other hand tries to maintain the legitimacy of communist ideology (Potter 2003). Many previous studies assume the relationship between government and religion was a dualistic suppress-resistant one (Aikman 2012). Recent studies note that there are very complex negotiations, sometimes hostile and other times friendly, going on between religion and the government in daily life in China (Cao 2010; Koesel 2014). This negotiation and interaction, however, involve with not only religious institution and national state, but also various social institutions in civil society, such as education institution. This project, then, attempts to address these understudied issues of religion in contemporary China. The following chapters include three independent studies addressing each issue separately.

Theoretically, the first study revisits and updates the life deprivation theory of religious involvement. Specifically, I argue that there are three mechanisms linking life strains and religious involvement: searching strategically for materialistic benefits, increasing existential security, and coping with emotional deprivation. While the former two approaches have been widely explored by economists and sociologists, the later one has been discarded due to limitations of method and data. Using Lagged Dependent Variable models on the China Family Panel Study, this study provides support for the subjective deprivation approach. Specifically, by controlling for previous wave of religiosity, this study found that various forms of life strains are linked with higher

probability of religious affiliation, higher religious attendance, and more religious salience. Subjective life deprivation is a significant mediator between life strains and religious involvement.

The second study examines the moral community thesis in the secular context of China. Using multilevel logistic regression, this chapter tests (1) whether both individual-level (measured by affiliation with organized or instituted religion) and aggregate-level religiosity (measured by the number of religious sites per 10,000 people in province) are inversely related to law and rule violations at the individual level and (2) whether provincial-level religiosity enhances the inverse relationship between individual religiosity and deviant behaviors. Results show that both individual- and aggregate-level religiosity are inversely related to the odds of violating the law and various rules of government, transportation, workplace, and other organizations. However, the cross-level interactions are not significant across models, indicating that contextual religiosity does not increase the effect of individual-level religiosity on deviance. Implications of findings for the moral community thesis are discussed.

In my third study, I investigate religious tolerance in Chinese society. Although religious tolerance in the official state has been widely discussed, there is little evidence about the social determinants of religious tolerance in China. Deriving from two competing perspectives on the educational effect on social tolerance—education as liberation and education as socialization—this chapter examines the relationship between education and religious tolerance in China, using the 2010 Wave of China General Social Survey. Results from multivariate regressions indicate that education in China only

increases religious tolerance on a general level and in private life. In contrast, educational attainment is correlated with less tolerance of religion in the public and political spheres.

Further Conclusions and discussions are followed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Life Strain, Subjective Deprivation and Religious Involvement

#### *Introduction*

Why do individuals get involved in religious practices? Will life strains experienced by individuals shape the motivations for religious conversion and religious involvement? What types of life strains are particularly important for religious involvement? What is the mechanism that life strains affect religious involvement? Theoretically, this study revisits and updates an old perspective on religious conversion — life deprivation theory. This theory asserts that individuals who suffered from life strains would increase religious involvement either to strategically search for materialistic benefits, or to fulfill their existential security, or to cope with their emotional deprivation. Specifically in modern society, where most people's survival is secured, coping with subjective life deprivation remains an important reason for religious conversion and religious involvement.

Empirically, this study examines whether suffering from life strains, especially exclusion by the broader society and by the powerful state, would increase religious involvement in one of the most modernized states—China—using the China Family Panel Studies from 2012 to 2014. The advantage of longitudinal data over cross-sectional data is that panel data permit empirical analysis of dynamic aspects of behaviors (Liker, Augustyniak, and Duncan 1985). Using Lagged Dependent Variable models (LDV), this study is able to control for the cofounders of religiosity, life strains, and subjective

deprivation. Consequently, it is able to identify the causal effect of life strains on subjective deprivation and on religiosity. This study begins with a review on the life deprivation theory, followed by a background introduction to the religious context in China. Next, the author will describe the hypotheses based on the updated life deprivation theory before turning to a description of data, measurements, and analytic strategy. Finally, I will present regression results followed by a discussion and conclusion.

### *Literature Review*

#### *The Life Deprivation Theory*

Among so many theories explaining religious involvement in contemporary society, the life deprivation theory is hardly a new one. Marx (1978) views religion as “the opium” of the lower class so that those who suffered from economic deprivation are able to lull themselves in the religious world. Accordingly, Marx believes that religion would continue to play a role until economic deprivation and class suppression disappear in a highly developed society. Religion, to Freud, is an expression of underlying psychological neuroses and psychic deprivation. Therefore, religion is an attempt to get control of the outside world, otherwise they would feel helpless (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1974; Cherry 2016; Freud 2012).

In 1965, Glock and Stark argue that life deprivation is a central factor for religious conversion and religious involvement—feeling deprived in their real world, people would increase religious involvement or embrace new religion for compensation or for questioning meaning. Religious community, in this sense, provides individuals with a source of gratification, “emotional and psychological supports” that they cannot find in

the larger society (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1974; Glock et al. 1967:65; Glock and Stark 1965). Then they specify five kinds of life deprivations that motivate religious involvement and new religion movement—economic, social, organismic, ethical, and psychic deprivation. In particular, social deprivation (a subjective feeling that one's social status is less than the others) and psychic deprivation (a subjective feeling of anomie and meaninglessness) are the most important reasons for church participation (Glock and Stark 1965). In addition, family deprivation (such as single people and childless families), can make people involve more in the church as church serves as a substitute for the family (Glock et al. 1967). Insecure attachment in childhood is also linked with religiousness in adult life (Granqvist and Hagekull 1999, 1999). Some scholars find that contextual levels of deprivation and marginality such as social inequality, war, and natural disaster can also increase individuals' church participation at the macro level (Land, Deane, and Blau 1991; Norris and Inglehart 2011).

Unfortunately, the life deprivation theory has long been discarded in religion research for two reasons. First, most studies found no association between religious commitment and subjective feeling of subjective deprivation measured by unfairness, life dissatisfaction, anomie, and alienation (Christiano 1986; Hadaway and Roof 1978; Hoge and Carroll 1978; Hoge and Polk 1980; Roof and Hoge 1980). Many health scholars even found that religious individuals tend to report significant higher level of subjective well-being, mental health and lower depression (Cheung and Yeung 2011; Ellison 1991; Koenig 2009). Second, little evidence has been found that religious involvement is associated with objective life deprivation. Even though in Glock and Stark consider life deprivation more as a subjective feeling of deprivation, many empirical studies used

objective measures of life deprivation, such as socioeconomic status, gender, and race, with the assumption that these objective life deprivations are associated with subjective feelings of deprivation. Most empirical studies, however, found that religious involvement does not necessarily decline with increase of education, income and social status (Hobart 1974; Hoge and Carroll 1978; Hoge and Polk 1980). Thus, some scholars suggests that the life deprivation theory, including the family surrogate theory, “should be given up” (Hoge and Roozen 1979:49–53). Even Stark himself has to revise his life deprivation theory and to conclude that economic deprivation is only a source of religiosity among church members but not for the American population as a whole. Specifically, he argues that life deprivation theory would only hold true to those who have minimal connection with religious perspectives (Stark 1972).

Nevertheless, several reasons suggest that the life deprivation theory should be examined and refined to explain religious commitment in contemporary society. First, most of these empirical studies examining the life deprivation theory fail to differentiate the causal effect of life deprivation on religious involvement from the attenuating effect of religious involvement on life deprivation. According to the life deprivation theory, there are two mechanisms going on at the same time. On one hand, individuals with life deprivation are more likely to increase religious involvement as they are more eager for compensation compared to their counterparts. On the other hand, higher religious involvement can protect individuals from objective life deprivation and attenuate subjective feeling of deprivation through organizational support, social network and interaction with divides (Amadi et al. 2016; Ellison 1991; Ferraro and Albrecht-Jensen 1991; Idler and Kasl 1992; Lim 2016; Lim and Putnam 2010). By cross-sectional data

and multivariate regression models, most the sociological studies were not able to identify the causal effect of life deprivation on religious commitment as they fail to exclude the protective effect of religious commitment from life deprivation. As Pargament (2002:169) describes, “a preponderance of cross-sectional designs... leave us unable to determine whether religion is the cause or [the] effect of well-being.” Therefore, with cross-sectional data, it is not surprise that many studies found no association or even a positive association between subjective life deprivation (even though to a less extent objective life deprivation) and religious involvement.

Using more advanced statistic methods (such as instrumental variable regression or longitudinal study) or experimental design, economists are able to solve the problem of model causality thus to identify the causal effect of financial strains—a particular form of life deprivation—on religious involvement (Berman 2000; Berman and Laitin 2008; Chen 2006, 2010). In particular, Chen (2010) used pre-crisis instrumental variables to estimate the impact of financial crisis on religious intensity in Indonesia. He found that individuals with a \$1 decline in monthly per-capita nonfood expenditures are 2% more likely to participate in Koran study and 1% more likely to send their kids to Islamic school. His explanation lies in that religion as a mutually supported community can provide financial assistance for church members to smooth the consumption shock caused by the financial crisis. Consequently, individuals with more financial strains are more committed to religion. With similar explanation, Zheng et al. (2010) found that rural farmers with chronic diseases are more likely to convert to Christianity in China as these people are looking for medical support in the religious community. Using a longitudinal follow-up study, Brown et al. (2004) found that widowed people are more likely than the

control group to increase religiosity 6 months, 24 months, and 48 months after the loss of their spouses, suggesting that family disruption—widowhood—can increase religious involvement (Brown et al. 2004).

Second, many of these studies have a narrow definition of life deprivation. In most studies, objective life deprivation is considered as lower socioeconomic status, thus measured by lower income, lower education attainment, female, and non-white races (Wimberley 1984). These sociodemographic factors, even though closely related with life deprivation, are actually not precise measurement of objective life deprivation (McLeod and Kessler 1990). Recent studies make a little improvement by specifying the effect of certain types of strains—financial strains, physical illness and widowhood—on religious involvement (Berman 2000; Brown et al. 2004; Chen 2010). However, the effect of other forms of strains, such as strains developing through social transition and strain with the authoritarian state, are quite understudied. Moreover, in previous studies, subjective life deprivation is considered as a similar source of religious involvement with objective life deprivation (Christiano 1986; Glock and Stark 1965; Hoge and Roozen 1979; Roof and Hoge 1980). Few studies have made the causal distinction between objective life deprivation and subjective life deprivation or compared between the affecting sizes of subjective life deprivation and objective life deprivation on religious involvement.

Third, the mechanism of life deprivation affecting religious involvement also needs to be refined. As pointed out by Lofland and Stark (1965:864), experiencing stress in life is one of the many “predisposing conditions” that push individuals into religion or higher religious involvement. However, the life deprivation theory has not really elaborated how life stress affects individuals’ subjective feeling of life deprivation and then increases

religious involvement. For Glock and his colleagues, the subjective life deprivation constitutes the central reason for religious involvement; meanwhile, they didn't specify how subjective life deprivation is developed over the life course (Glock et al. 1967; Glock and Stark 1965). Similarly, psychological scholars argue that particular forms of life strains, such as loss of intimates, would generate an attachment anxiety for individuals meanwhile individuals are able to reestablish this secure attachment with God through religious involvement (Brown et al. 2004; Granqvist and Hagekull 1999, 2000). Some scholars argue that economic deprivation at both individual and societal level serve as an existential insecurity to individuals while religious organizations can provide a substitute for this existential security (Immerzeel and van Tubergen 2013; Norris and Inglehart 2011). Meanwhile, economists religious organization as exclusive clubs that provide material public goods for religious members to deal with materialistic life strains; therefore, more deprived individuals are more involved in religion (Berman 1998; Berman and Laitin 2008; Chen 2010; Iannaccone 1998).

### *The Updated Life Deprivation Theory*

To compensate for the shortcomings of the life deprivation theory, this study will bring in the life strains studies and religion of health studies to refine the life deprivation theory. Specifically, this study argues that both objective life strains and subjective life deprivation can affect religious involvement. There are three channels through which objective life strains increase religious involvement searching for materialistic benefits, looking for existential security, and coping with subjective deprivation. Notably, subjective deprivation, mentioned by Glock and Stark, is only one of the many mechanisms by which religious involvement increases with life strains.

First, objective life deprivation can increase individuals' religious commitment. Different from previous studies that consider lower socioeconomic status and marginal races with objective life deprivation (Hoge and Roozen 1979; Wimberley 1984), this paper conceptualizes objective life deprivation more specifically as different forms of life strains—social relationships and events that occur to individuals but are disliked by those individuals (Agnew 1985, 1992). Many previous studies have already examined that material deprivation, unemployment, family disruption (loss of spouse), and chronic diseases are important factors for religious involvement (Brown et al. 2004; Chen 2010; Immerzeel and van Tubergen 2013; Norris and Inglehart 2011; Zheng et al. 2010). Besides that, only a few studies explore the effect of other forms of life strains on religious involvement. For example, some scholars found that contextual level of life strains—the welfare spending of a nation, the social inequality, economic crisis—can also increase individuals' religiosity (Immerzeel and van Tubergen 2013; Solt, Habel, and Grant 2011). Based on a longitudinal survey before and after the 2011 Christchurch Earthquake in New Zealand, Sibley and Bulbulia (2012) found that experiencing natural disasters, such as an earthquake, can also significantly increase the religious involvement in New Zealand despite the overall religious erosion in the country. Migration status (Healy and Breen 2014) and social exclusion (Aydin, Fischer, and Frey 2010) have also been found to be linked with higher religious involvement.

Second, there are three mechanisms that objective life strains increase religious commitment: strategically searching for materialistic benefits, looking for existential security and coping with subjective deprivation. Many economists on religion studies have already widely examined how religious involvement increases with life strains as a

materialistic strategy to handle these life strains. Basically, economists consider religious organization as an exclusive club that provides particular forms of public goods such as financial support and social support. With realistic support, religious members are able to deal with the objective life strains. For example, Chen (2010) found that religion can provide credit support for religious members as an ex-post social insurance while credit availability can reduce the effect of economic distress on religious intensity by 80%. Similarly, poor people from regions that lack public goods support from the government are more likely to join in strict religions and even terrorist groups for mutual insurance (Berman 2000; Berman and Laitin 2008); new rural medical insurance supported by government can significantly substitute religious conversion in rural China (Zheng et al. 2010).

Despite considering religious conversion and religious involvement as a rational strategy for people to deal with their objective life deprivation, sociologists and psychologists emphasize people's religious conversion and involvement as an action to their emotional deprivation. Noted in previous studies, there are different types of emotional deprivation. Norris and Inglehart (2011:4) proposed that existential security is the reason for religious involvement. "Existential security" is defined as "the feeling that survival is secure enough that it can be taken for granted". Thus, people with materialistic deprivation and less developed societies are more involved in religion "one of the key functions of religion is to provide a sense of security in an insecure world" for those with less existential security (Inglehart and Welzel 2005:27). Instead, with the development of society and social systems, individuals will become more secular, and thus, they would no longer stay in church.

To make their definition of “existential security” clearer, Norris, Inglehart and their followers refer to the United Nation’s definition of human security which contains seven domains: economic security, food security, health security (access to health services), environmental security (a healthy physical environment that is free from pollution and natural disaster), personal security (living a life free from the threat of violence), community security (embedded in a community that provides culture, values, and support) and political security (living in a society where basic human rights are not violated) (Healy and Breen 2014; Norris and Inglehart 2011). Empirical studies examining this theory at individual level often link existential insecurity with basic human conditions such as access to basic resources (food and water), economic insecurity (unemployment and lower income), experiencing natural disaster and political insecurity in terms of immigrant/refugee status (Healy and Breen 2014; Immerzeel and van Tubergen 2013; Sibley and Bulbulia 2012).

Different from existential security, which emphasizes life strains as a threat or danger to individuals’ survival, the life deprivation theory argues that the subjective feeling of deprivation drives individuals to religious involvement (Glock and Stark 1965; Norris and Inglehart 2011). This argument is very similar to recent studies on religious coping—individuals increase religious involvement not necessarily because their survival is threatened (existential security argument) or they can resolve the objective life strains (materialistic benefit), but they want themselves to feel emotionally better. When suffering from objective life strains, individuals react differently, but mostly with negative feelings (Pearlin et al. 1981), which are defined as subjective life deprivations by Glock and Stark (1965).

There are various forms of subjective deprivation. A particular form of subjective deprivation—attachment deprivation—has been widely studied by psychologists. Essentially, these studies argue that people develop secure attachment to their primary caregivers at an early age and this secure attachment is vital for individuals' development of personality and social interaction. Those who lack the secure attachment with their primary caregivers in early life stages are more likely to convert and establish similar attachment to god(s) to compensate for this childhood insufficiency (Kirkpatrick 1992; Rowatt and Kirkpatrick 2002). The alternative situation is that when individuals suffer from the loss of loved ones, they are more likely to increase religious involvement to compensate for the loss of their attachment (Brown et al. 2004; Granqvist and Hagekull 1999, 2000). Feeling of anomie and alienation is also an important form of subjective deprivation that drives people into religion for life meanings. Through interacting with homogenous religious counterparts and practicing a whole system of meaning articulated in religious doctrine, individuals regain life purpose and life certainty (Glock and Stark 1965). Other negative emotions, such as unhappiness, depression, fear, loneliness, unfairness, anxiety, anger and desperation can also make people turn to religion as people can smooth their negative emotions through religious community and religious practice (Aydin et al. 2010; Burris et al. 1994). However, it is still unknown whether introverted emotional deprivation (such as depression, fear, and unhappiness) or extroverted emotional deprivation (such as anger and anxiety) has a stronger effect on religious involvement.

Despite this limitation, subjective life deprivation is one of the many mechanisms that explain individuals' religious involvement under objective life strains. Besides

subjective life deprivation, existential security and materialistic benefits provided by religious doctrines and religious community can also be the motivators for religious involvement. Thus, this study hypothesizes that:

H1. Objective life strains are positively associated with religious involvement.

H2. Subjective life deprivation can partially (not totally) mediate the significant relationship between objective life strains and religious involvement.

### *Religious Context of China*

Despite the secularization prediction that religion would disappear in the modern society (Berger 2011; Norris and Inglehart 2011), religion in China has been growing over the past four decades along with the unprecedented modernization process (Bays 1999; Potter 2003; Stark and Wang 2015; Yang 2006, 2011, 2016). Not only traditional local religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and folk religions are reviving in China, but newer religions such as Christianity and Islam are actively practiced (Ashiwa and Wank 2009; Bays 1999; Dean 2003; Kipnis 2001; Yang 2004).

Many scholars have provided explanations for the rise of religion in China. Religious market theory argues that strict religious regulation would discourage the competition among religious organization and religious supply in the market, thus reduce overall religiosity in the market (Iannaccone et al. 1997; Stark and Finke 2000).

Accordingly, Yang (2006) proposed a triple-market theory in China. That is, because of strict religious regulation from the government, religious market in China divides into three sections—a red market supported by the government, a black market forbidden by the government and a grey market with an ambiguous status. The red market has been always undersupplied because of regulation and many people have to

practice religion in grey and black markets (Yang 2006). When the government released religious regulation gradually after 1978, many religious organizations gained certain space, thus increasing religious supply in the red market. Therefore, reported religious participation by government and social surveys would increase suddenly as individuals turned from the underground market to the red market (Froese 2008; Yang 2006). The religious market theory<sup>1</sup> is very helpful for understanding the rise of religion at a macro level in China after the Economic Reform in 1978. Instead of taking the religious market theory assumption that religious demand is fixed and randomly attributed to individuals, many other theories try to explore social and individual factors that motivate religious conversion at the micro level. In modern society, these studies try to track the social and demographic factors that can convert individuals.

Network conversion theory provides a helpful perspective to understand religious conversion in China. As proposed by the theory, network attachment lies at the heart of conversion (Lofland and Stark 1965). People always try to preserve or maximize their social capital of interpersonal attachment in making religious decisions. In normal circumstances, people will retain their original religious identity to avoid losing their social capital (Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Stark and Glock 1968). Instead, people will convert to ally their religious identity with their new social network if the original network attachment is weaker (Stark and Finke 2000). Using the survey data from rural China in Anhui and Henan Province, Stark and Wang (Stark and Wang 2015) confirms

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<sup>1</sup> Many sociologists call the religious market theory developed by Stark and Finke as the rational choice theory since this theory applied economic theory to understand religion. Obviously Stark and Finke argue that individuals make rational choice to participate their religious behaviors instead of an irrational one. However, rational choice theory is much broader than the one proposed by Stark and Finke. Household production model, club good theory, network dependence theory and human capital theory are also partially or totally involve in rational choice theory.

that peasants convert to Christianity through their relatives and friends. Furthermore, Wang (2013) explains that rural labor migration in China erodes the traditional kinship network and provides space for new religion (Christianity in particular) to enhance interpersonal attachment.

Beyond these explanations, will life deprivation theory provides some insights for religious conversion and religious involvement in China? Particularly since the late 1970s, China has launched a serious of economic and social reform, which has brought profound economic and social transition. In the economy, there are three patterns going on together—decentralization (decentralize economic power to the local state), marketilization (transforming the communist economic system to the capitalist market system), and globalization (merging the national economic system with the global market) (Wei 2001, 2013). To correspond with economic transition, tremendous social reforms in education, social security, housing, fertility, migration, and employment, etc., have also been emphasized by the powerful state (Chan, Ngok, and Phillips 2008). While these social and economic reforms bring great economic advancement overall in the society and make China one of the most advanced states in the world, at the same time they bring tremendous social and environmental cost, suffered by individuals in this state. Specifically, social problems such as regional inequality, rural-urban inequality, deprivation of community, erosion of collective identity and traditional morality, conflicts of benefitting groups, and government corruption come along with the economic advancement (Cao 2000; Kan, Chen, and Tong 2012; Kanbur and Zhang 1999; Sun 2004; Yan 2003; Zhang and Kanbur 2005).

These dramatic social and political changes, the erosion of traditional morality and collective identity, the lack of established welfare and social arrangement, all bring feelings of uncertainty and insecurity for individuals overall in this society (Fan, Whitehead, and Whitehead 2005; Yang 2005). Moreover, the enlarged social and economic inequality, social conflicts, and conflicts with the powerful state bring subjective feeling of unfairness, hopelessness, alienation, and anomie for individuals. Increased social and economic competition bring also tremendous pressure and anxiety to the people of all classes and statuses (Graham, Zhou, and Zhang 2017). With life strains, social agents are looking for channels to cope with their emotional deprivation. Is increasing religious involvement in China a way for individuals to cope with these social and political life strains in modern China? Do subjective feelings of deprivation explain partially the relationship between life strains and religious involvement?

Some scholars have already provided evidence that life strains experienced by individuals in a rigidly transitional society can increase religious involvement. For example, based on case interviews with certain Buddhists in Shenzhen city, Fan et al. (2005) found that urban Chinese people are involved with Buddhist practices in order to find peace in their inner world; Yang (2005) suggests that urban elites in China are converting to Christianity in order to get a sense of certainty about the past and future. Zheng and his colleagues (2010) found that chronic diseases makes rural peasant convert to Christianity in rural China.

However, most of these findings are grounded on limited case studies in particular cities. A quantitative study examining the link between disease and religious involvement by Zheng et al. is based on a very small cross-sectional sample in Henan Province

(N=337). Besides that, this paper examines the substitute the effect of a rural insurance system on religious conversion in rural areas, which argues that people convert to Christianity for materialistic considerations. Nevertheless, they haven't examined the effects of other forms of life strains, especially social exclusion and political strains on religious involvement in China.

To compensate for these gaps, this study will use the two waves of national representative panel data—the 2010-2014 Chinese Family Panel Study—to examine the causal effect of various types of life strains on religious affiliation, religious attendance and religious salience. Using panel data, each model in this study will control religiosity, which is an important cofounder of latent life strains, latent subjective life deprivation, and latent religiosity in the first wave of the survey. As suggested by economists, religious organizations are efficient public goods providers for local society, and higher religious involvement can consequently protect individuals from objective life strains (Berman 1998; Berman and Laitin 2008; Chen 2010). In the context of China, however, previous waves of religious involvement can also link with more life strains such as religious regulation from the government (F. Yang 2010). In addition, higher religious involvement can usually buffer the effect of stressful events on individuals' wellbeing, which suggests that religious involvement can protect individuals from subjective life deprivation (Clark and Leikes 2005; Ellison 1991; Leikes 2006; Schwab and Petersen 1990; Sibley and Bulbulia 2012). On the other hand, controlling for previous waves of religious involvement can control for other determinants for religious involvement, such as religious regulations, religious networks, and personality (Ellis 1985; Rongping Ruan et al. 2016; Stark and Finke 2000). Thus, these models are better able to identify the

effect of life strains on religious involvement compared to previous models using cross-sectional data.

In particular, this study will examine the effects of five major forms of life strains on religious commitments—social exclusion, political conflict, marital disruption, chronic disease, and materialistic deprivation. Compared with marital disruption, chronic disease, and materialistic deprivation, no studies have examined the effect of social exclusion and political conflicts on religious involvement in China (Stark and Wang 2015; Zheng et al. 2010). Besides, this study also examines the effect of migration on religious commitment. Even though some scholars have pointed out that migration will increase religiosity because it is related with lower existential security, I try to avoid considering migration in China as a life strain (Healy and Breen 2014). Even though rural-urban migration in China separates families and relatives from each other, it also provides individuals with better access to material, educational, and public resources (Xu and Xie 2015). Yet, I will still examine whether migration plays a role for individuals' religious involvement.

In addition, this study will examine whether subjective deprivation is one of the mediators of life strains on religious commitment. As elaborated in the theory section, there are three potential mechanisms explaining the link between life strains and religious commitments: materialistic benefits, existential security, and subjective deprivation. This study will investigate particularly whether subjective deprivation is a mechanism explaining how life strains affect religious involvement. Using the Sobel-Goodman mediation test, this study will specify how much subjective life deprivation mediates the effect of different forms of life strains on religious commitment. It would be very

possible that subjective life deprivation explains more of the effects of particular life strains on religious involvement and less of the others.

### *Data and Method*

#### *Data*

Data used in this study comes from the 2012-2014 Wave of China Family Panel Studies (CFPS). CFPS is a nationwide, comprehensive and longitudinal social survey launched by Peking University in China. This dataset collected individual, family and communal data to reveal the social change that China has been undergoing (extensive information about the survey can be found at [www.iss.edu.cn/cfps/](http://www.iss.edu.cn/cfps/)). The 2010 survey of the CFPS is the baseline wave of the survey, which covers 635 neighborhoods in 162 counties of the 25 provinces in China (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hainan, Ningxia, and Qinghai) and represents about 94.5% of the population in mainland China. Through a multistage probability proportional to size sampling procedure (PPS), this survey successfully completed interviews with 14,960 sampled households and all individuals living in these households. The 2012 and 2014 survey waves tracked these respondents in the baseline survey (Xie and Hu 2014; Xie and Lu 2015). In 2012 and 2014 waves of CFPS, questions on religious affiliation, religious attendance, and religious salience were asked. Besides, all three waves of surveys include questions on collective life strains and individual strains, making it ideal for a study of the effect of life strains on religious involvement. Excluding missing values, 20,856 adult respondents (age >16) who finished both 2012 and 2014 surveys are analyzed.

*Dependent Variables.* This study will examine three outcome variables—religious affiliation, religious attendance, and religious salience. Religious affiliation in 2014 is a binary variable created based on the question “what do you believe in (1=Buddha/Bodhisattva; 2=Taoist deities; 3=Allah; 4=Heaven god in Catholicism; 5=God in Protestantism; 6=ancestor; 78=I believe in nothing)?” People who reported that they believe at least one religious image is coded as 1 and 0 otherwise. Notably, the religious affiliation question is asked slightly different in the survey of 2012. In 2012 wave of survey, respondents were asked “What is your religion? (1=Buddhism, 2=Taoism, 3=Islam; 4=Protestantism; 5=Catholicism; 6=No religion; 77=Other religions)”.

Compared with the survey in 2012, the design of the religious affiliation question is different in three ways: 1) the 2014 survey asked about belief in god(s) from different religions while 2012 wave of survey asked individual’s religious affiliation directly; 2) the 2014 survey specified ancestor worship as a religious belief while the 2012 wave of survey let respondents make the choice by themselves;<sup>2</sup> 3) the 2014 survey allowed individuals to make multiple choices for their religious affiliation while the 2012 survey only allowed individuals to make one choice for their religious affiliation. By making such an adjustment, 2014 survey captures higher percentage of religious affiliation compared to 2012 survey. Thus, 23.2% and 11.2% of respondents reported religious identity in 2014 and 2012 respectively.

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<sup>2</sup> If respondents agree ancestor worship is a religion, they can always put their religious affiliation in the “other religions” category.

Religious attendance is generated based on two questions asked in the 2014 survey. Respondents who reported believing in Buddhism, Taoism, and ancestor worship were asked “How often do you burn incense and pray to Buddha (*Nin shaoxiangbaifo de pinlv you duo gao*) (1=never, 2=once every year; 3=several times a year; 4=once every month; 5=two to three times a month; 6=once every week; 7=several times every week; 8=almost every day)?” Respondents who reported belief in Allah or Christian gods were asked, “How often do you go to mosque/church (*Nin Zuolibai de pinlv you duo gao*) (1=never, 2=once every year; 3=several times a year; 4=once every month; 5=two to three times a month; 6=once every week; 7=several times every week; 8=almost every day)?” In Chinese translation, “Shaoxiangbaifo” is a religious practice of local religion while “Zuolibai” is more of a religious practice in Abrahamic religions. Religious attendance value is assigned to either the frequency of local religious attendance or the frequency of Abrahamic religious attendance. For those who reported both local religious attendance and Abrahamic religious practice, religious attendance value is taken from the higher value of the two items. In 2012 survey, the religious attendance question is asked more generally as “How often do you participate religious activities (1=never, 2=once every year; 3=several times a year; 4=once every month; 5=two to three times a month; 6=once every week; 7=several times every week)?”

Religious salience is a 3-point Likert scale based on the question, “Regardless of participating religious activities, is religion important for you (1=very important; 2=somewhat important; 3=not important at all)?” To make this directly consistent with the other three outcome variables, the measurement is reverse-coded so that a higher value implies higher religious salience. The religious salience question is asked exactly

the same in the 2012 and 2014 surveys. In the 2014 survey, 7.38% people reported that religion is very important to them, which is slightly higher than the percent reported in 2012 (6.08%). Since religious salience is the only question that was asked exactly the same in both survey, the change of religious salience is the most precise measurement to compare religious change across 2012 to 2014, suggesting that the average level of religious salience is increasing in China.

*Independent Variables.* The key independent variables are five types of objective life strains—social exclusion, political strain, marital disruption, chronic disease and material deprivation. Social exclusion is generated based on three items asking “Have you ever experienced the following issues over the past one year: being unfairly treated by others because of economic inequality /residence/ gender?” Respondents who have experienced any of the items are assigned as 1 and 0 otherwise in social exclusion. Similarly, based on the question “Have you ever been unfairly treated over the past one year by the government/ in conflict with the officials/ procrastinated/unreasonably charged by the government”, political strain is assigned as 1 for respondents who reported any of the experiences and 0 otherwise. 14.8% and 21.4% respondents reported that they have experienced social exclusion and political strain over the past year. Marital disruption is a binary variable assigning 1 to respondents who experienced divorce or loss of spouse during 2012 to 2014. Chronic disease is a binary variable based on the question “Do you have chronic disease over the past half a year (0=no; 1=yes)?” Material deprivation is measured by the log transformation of individual income. The higher the log value of income, the less deprived individuals are in materials.

Subjective life deprivation reported in 2014 is used to examine whether mechanism that life strains affect religious involvement. The subjective life deprivation measure composes of six items ( $\alpha=.8576$ ) with 5-likert scale—"How often have you experienced the following emotional status: feeling depressed/nervous/restless/hopefully/difficult to do anything/meaningless in doing everything (1=almost every day; 2=very often; 3=about half of the time; 4=sometimes; 5=never)?" After reverse coding these items, I calculate a composite subjective deprivation score by adding the scores for each items together so that a higher score reflects higher subjective deprivation for the respondents.

### *Controlled Variables*

To controlled for sources of spuriousness, religiosity in 2012 is controlled, which includes religious affiliation in 2012 (0=no; 1=yes), religious attendance (1=never, 2=once every year; 3=several times a year; 4=once every month; 5=two to three times a month; 6=once every week; 7=several times every week) and religious salience in 2012 (1= not important at all ; 2= somewhat important ;3=very important).

Other variables that may affect both life strains and religiosity in 2014 wave of survey are also controlled: age ( $>16$ ); gender (0 =female; 1=male); ethnicity (0=Han ethnicity; 1=minor ethnicity); highest education (1=no education; 2=primary school; 3=middle school; 4=high school/vocational high school; 5=vocational college; 6=college; 7=postgraduate), residence (0=urban; 1=rural); communist party member (0=no political affiliation or other political affiliation; 1=communist party member) and migration (0=no migration; 1=live in a different place since 2012). Contextual level of factors such as economic development, local government regulation, cultural legacy, education, and

economic development may alter the relationship between life strains and religious involvement at individual level (Koesel 2014; Stark and Wang 2014; Yang 2006; Ying 2009). Therefore, provincial fixed effect is also controlled in every model (See Table 2.1 for more information).

Table 2.1

*Descriptive Variables (N=20,856)*

Variable	Mean/percent	Std.	Range
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
Religious affiliation in 2014	0.232	0.422	0-1
Religious attendance in 2014	1.611	1.476	1-8
Religious salience in 2014	1.291	0.595	1-3
<i>Independent variable</i>			
<i>Religiosity in 2012</i>			
Religious affiliation in 2012	0.112	0.316	0-1
Religious attendance in 2012	1.219	0.896	1-7
Religious salience in 2012	1.239	0.551	1-3
<i>Life strains</i>			
Social exclusion	0.148	0.355	0-1
Political strain	0.214	0.410	0-1
Chronic disease	0.190	0.392	0-1
Divorced/widowed	0.077	0.266	0-1
Log(income)	4.132	4.368	0-12.9
<i>Other controlled variables</i>			
Migration	0.063	0.243	0-1
Age	45.576	14.813	17-91
Minor Ethnicity	0.058	0.234	0-1
Male			
Communist party member	0.081	0.273	0-1
Rural residence	0.536	0.499	0-1
Education	2.473	1.318	1-7
Subjective deprivation in 2014	9.270	4.051	6-30

### *Analytic Strategy*

This study will use lagged dependent variable model (LDV) to estimate the effect of life strain on various forms of religiosity. In sociology, the lagged dependent variable model is the most typical way to handle panel data (especially with two waves of data) (Halaby 2004; Vaisey and Miles 2017). With the lagged dependent variable model, the model takes the following forms,

$$y_{it} = \mu + \rho y_{t-1} + \beta X'_{it} + \gamma Z'_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}, \quad t=2$$

In the model,  $y_{it}$  denotes religiosity reported by individual  $i$  in 2014,  $y_{t-1}$  is religiosity reported by the same individual in 2012.  $X'_{it}$  denotes the values of all observed time-varying variables for the respondents, including various forms of strains (social discrimination, political conflict, chronic disease, marital disruption and material deprivation), migration, age and income.  $Z'_{it}$  is the values of any observed time-constant variables for the respondent, such as gender, education, ethnicity and urban-rural residence.  $\varepsilon_{it}$  refers to the random stuff that varies from wave to wave for each respondents with the assumption that  $E(\varepsilon_{it} | Y_{it}, X_{it}, Z_{it}) = 0$ .

The idea behind the lagged dependent variable model is that the lagged value of  $y$  serve as a proxy for unserved items that affecting the respondents' answers equally across all waves. Thus by controlling for  $y_{t-1}$ , the model can reduce the bias of estimates (Morgan et al. 2002). By controlling for religiosity in 2012, I control for the causal effect of religiosity in 2012 on life strains and on subjective life deprivation in 2014 thus to identify the causal effect of life strain and subjective life deprivation on religiosity in 2014.

There are some critiques on this model, however. For example, this model relies on the assumption that the relationship between  $y_{t-1}$  and observed fixed effect instead of exploring the observed fixed effect directly. Also this model uses between-respondent variable to estimate the coefficient, which may consequently inflate the coefficient estimated (Allison 2009; Vaisey and Miles 2017). Thus, they provides other models to analyze panel data, such as fix effect model (FE) and Hybrid model. However, FE mode only uses the within respondents variations only thus the time-constant variables are not observed, which is a huge disaster for sociologists (Vaisey and Miles 2017). Also, hybrid model is not doing as good as expected in non-linear model (Allison 2014). When  $y_{t-1}$  has a true causal effect on  $y_{it}$  or when  $X'$  and  $Z'$  are correlated with the transient component of  $y_{t-1}$ , the lagged dependent variable model is appropriate (Allison 2009).

Previous studies have provided solid theoretical and empirical argument that  $y_{t-1}$  -- previous wave of religiosity—have a strong effect on  $y_{it}$ , the later wave of religiosity. According to religious human capital theory, individuals' religious choice depends not only on time and wage, but also upon their stock of religious knowledge, familiarity with church ritual and doctrine, as well as friendship within religious network. Thus, individual's religious involvement and preference are highly depended on their previous religious involvement and accumulation of religious knowledge (Iannaccone 1998). Therefore, LDV model can be useful in estimate the effect of life strain on religiosity despite some shortages mentioned before.

Table 2.2 reported the effects of life strains on religious involvement using LDV model. Model (1), (3) and (5) examines the effect of life strains on religious affiliation, religious attendance and religious salience reported in 2014 controlling for religiosity in

2012 and other social demographic variable. Model (2), (4) and (6) reported standard coefficients based on Model (1), (3) and (5) respectively thus to compare the effect sizes of various types of life strains on religious involvement.

To examine the mediating effect of subjective deprivation, three steps of analysis are applied. First, the effects of various forms of life strains on subjective deprivation are reported in Table 2.3 controlling for basic sociodemographic variables and religiosity in 2012. Second, on the basis of Table 2.2, subjective depression is controlled in every model and reported in Table 2.4 to examine how the effects of life strains on religious involvement is mediated. Column (1), (3) and (5) in Table 4 report the mediating effect of subjective life strains on religious affiliation, religious participation and religious salience respectively. Column (2), (4) and (6) calculate the proportion of total effect of life strains that is mediated by subjective deprivation using Sobal-Goodman Test. Provincial effect is controlled in every model.

## *Results*

### *The Effect of Life Strains on Religious Involvement*

Table 2.2 displays the regression results predicting the effect of life strains on religious affiliation, religious attendance, and religious salience. According to model 1, life strains is significantly associated with affiliating with a religion in China, which support for hypothesis 1. Experiencing social discrimination, conflicts with government, chronic diseases and material deprivation are all significant predictors of religious affiliation while marital disruption has no association with religious affiliation.

Specifically, respondent who have been discriminated by the society because of their gender, residence or income reported 26.43% ( $e^{.235}=1.2643$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) higher odds of

affiliating with religious affiliation when religiosity in the previous wave is controlled. Respondent experienced with political strains are 17.16% ( $e^{.158}=1.1716$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) more likely to affiliate with religion. Compared to healthy people, respondent with chronic disease are 24.48% ( $e^{.219}$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) more likely to affiliate with religion. Compared to respondents with higher income, individuals with low incomes are more likely to affiliate with religion ( $p<0.001$ ), which suggests that material deprivation is a motivation for religious involvement (Norris and Inglehart 2011). Meanwhile, marital disruption (i.e. death of spouse or divorce) is not significantly associated with religious affiliation. Model 2 reports the standardized coefficients of the regression based on Model 1.

According to Model 2, the standardized coefficients of chronic disease, social exclusion, income and political strain are 0.04, 0.039, -0.037 and 0.03 respectively. This suggests chronic disease is the most important life strain that making people convert. At the same time, social exclusion, political strain and material deprivation explain similar size of the variation of religious affiliation.

Model (3) displays the OLS regression result of life strains on religious attendance. When other factor controlled, social discrimination, conflict with government, chronic disease and material deprivation are significant predictor for religious attendance. Compared to those without discriminated experience, individuals who were discriminated for particular reason score 0.07 higher in the frequency of religious attendance ( $p<0.001$ ). Those who have experienced conflicts with government reported 0.07 higher in the frequency of religious attendance compared to those who haven't ( $p<0.001$ ). People suffered chronic disease also participate religious activities more ( $b=0.06$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). As anticipated, income is negatively correlated with religious

attendance. For each log unite increase of income, the frequency of religious attendance declines by 0.009.

Table 2.2

*Regression Results of Life Strains on Religious Involvement  
based on LDV Model*

Variables	Religious affiliation		Religious attendance		Religious salience	
<i>Life strains</i>						
Social exclusion	0.235***	0.039	0.0717**	0.017	0.184***	0.032
	-0.055		-0.026		-0.050	
Political strain	0.158**	0.030	0.0733**	0.02	0.119**	0.024
	-0.048		-0.023		-0.045	
Chronic disease	0.219***	0.04	0.0579*	0.015	0.072	0.014
	-0.048		-0.023		-0.045	
Divorced/widowed	0.115	0.014	0.038	0.07	0.060	0.008
	-0.072		-0.034		-0.067	
Log(income)	-0.0183***	-0.037	-0.0096***	-0.027	-0.005	-0.01
	-0.005		-0.002		-0.004	
Migration	-0.079	-0.009	-0.0821*	-0.013	-0.062	-0.007
	-0.081		-0.037		-0.073	
Religious affiliation 2012	1.649***	0.242	0.474***	0.097	0.542***	0.082
	-0.075		-0.043		-0.068	
Religious attendance 2012	0.203***	0.085	0.501***	0.289	0.271***	0.115
	-0.031		-0.014		-0.023	
Religious salience 2012	0.594***	0.152	0.349***	0.126	1.023***	0.272
	-0.038		-0.021		-0.033	
_cons	-2.331***		0.275*			
	-0.258		-0.115			
Cut1_cons					2.564***	
					-0.211	
Cut2_cons					4.149***	
					-0.214	
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>			0.268			

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001; Age, ethnicity, communist party membership, urban-rural residence, education and Provincial Fixed effect controlled in every model; Full results in this model upon request only.

Model 4 reports the standardized coefficients of life strains on religious attendance. Accordingly, the effect sizes of income, political strain, social exclusion and chronic disease are -0.027, 0.02, 0.017 and 0.015 respectively. That is, political strain and social exclusion have a higher effect in promoting religious attendance compared to suffering from chronic disease. Meanwhile material deprivation remains the most important reason among all types of life strains for religious attendance.

Model 5 explores the effects of life strains on religious salience by ordered logistic regression. As expected by hypothesis, social exclusion and political strain are negatively associated with religious salience controlled for previous wave of religiosity and sociodemographic factors. Compared to those without social exclusion, people suffered from social discrimination are 20.2% more likely to reported higher level of religious salience ( $p < 0.001$ ). When other conditions equal, those suffered from political strains are 12.6% more likely to reported higher level of religious salience compared with those without political strains ( $p = 0.008$ ). Besides social exclusion and political strains, other forms of social strains—disease, marital disruption and materialistic deprivation, however are not related with religious salience.

Model 6 reports the standardized coefficients of life strains on religious salience. Different from Model 2 and 4 suggesting that chronic disease and material deprivation are the most influential life strains on religious affiliation and religious attendance, Model 6 suggests that social exclusion and political strain are the most important reason for higher religious salience. Specifically, for one unite increase in social exclusion and political strain multiply the odds of reporting higher religious salience by 106.8% ( $e^{0.032}$ ) and 105% ( $e^{0.0238}$ ) respectively.

Besides life strains, religiosity reported in the previous wave are important and significant predictor of religiosity in the second wave. Migration is found to associate with religious attendance significantly but not with religious affiliation and religious salience. Compared with non-migrant residents, migrant respondents reported 0.082 unite lower in religious attendance ( $p=0.028$ ). Older people reported higher religious attendance but not higher religious affiliation and religious salience. Minor ethnicity is related with higher religious affiliation and religious salience but not with higher religious attendance. Compared with urban residents, rural residents in China are less likely to affiliate with religion, report lower religious attendance and religious salience. Interestingly, communist party members and higher educated people are less likely to affiliate with religion or participate religious activities, but they are as likely as the other people to report their religious salience.

#### *The Mediating Effect of Subjective Deprivation*

Table 2.3 and Table 2.4 examine the mediating effect of subjective life deprivation on the effect of life strains on religious involvement. First, Table 3 reported OLS regression results of life strains on subjective life deprivation. According to Model 1, social exclusion can significantly increase 2.4 unites of subjective feeling of deprivation, which is significant at 95% confident interval. Model 2 suggests that political strain can significant increase 1.68 unite of subjective life deprivation ( $p<0.001$ ). People suffered from chronic disease, as suggested in Model 3, reported 1.83 higher in subjective life deprivation compared to healthy respondents. Marital deprivation can also increase 0.79 unite of subjective life deprivation. Income is negatively associated with subjective life deprivation, which suggests that material deprivation can also bring

subjective feeling of deprivation. In all, social exclusion, political strain, chronic disease, marital disruption and material deprivation are contributive to subjective feeling of deprivation (See Column 6).

Table 2.3

*Regression Results of Life Strains on Subjective Deprivation*

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Social exclusion	2.411***					1.886***
	-0.0731					-0.077
Political strain		1.680***				0.973***
		-0.0639				-0.0668
Chronic disease			1.835***			1.644***
			-0.069			-0.0673
Divorced/widowed				0.791***		0.829***
				-0.11		-0.106
Log(income)					-0.0273***	-0.0246***
adj. R-sq	0.095	0.08	0.08	0.053	0.051	0.132

Notes: (1) Model (1)-(5) examines the effects of social exclusion, political strain, chronic disease, marital disruption and income on subjective deprivation respectively. Model (6) examines the effect of all types of life strains together on subjective life deprivation; (2) Controlling for migration, age, ethnicity, CCP membership, rural residence, education, religious affiliation, religious salience and religious attendance in 2012; (3) Controlling for provincial fixed effect; (4) Standard errors in parentheses \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001.

Model 1, 3 and 5 in Table 4 report the regression results of life strains on religious affiliation, religious attendance and religious salience respectively by adding control of subjective life deprivation. Model 1 reports the mediating effect of subjective life deprivation on religious affiliation. After subjective life deprivation is controlled in Model 1, the significant coefficients of life strains on religious affiliation decline. Specifically, the effect of social exclusion, political strain, chronic disease and log (income) on religious affiliation decline from 0.235 to 0.174, 0.158 to 0.127, 0.219 to 0.164 and 0.0183 to 0.0178 respectively (compared between Model 1 in Table 2.3 and

Model 1 in Table 2.4). At the same time, subjective life deprivation is highly significant predictor for the probability of religious affiliation. That is, one unite increase in subjective life deprivation multiplies the probability of religious affiliation by 103.3%.

Model 2 reports the proportion of effect that is mediated by depression by Sobel-Goodman Test. Accordingly, subjective life deprivation mediates 23.3%, 22.7%, 26.7% and 17.8% of the effect of social exclusion, political strain, chronic disease and income on religious affiliation, which are all significant at 99% confident interval. Thus, it is safe to conclude that subjective life deprivation can significant and partially mediate the effect of life strains on religious affiliation.

Model 3 examines the mediating effect of subjective life deprivation on the relationship between life strains and religious attendance. After subjective life deprivation is controlled in the model, the significant coefficients of social exclusion, political strain, chronic and log transformation of income decline from 0.0717 to 0.0631, 0.0733 to 0.0664, 0.0579 to 0.0495 and 0.096 to 0.094 respectively (compared across model 3 in Table 2.3 and Model 3 in Table 2.4). At the same time, subjective life deprivation is positively associated with religious attendance. Specifically for one unite increase in subjective feeling of life deprivation, respondents reported 0.005 unite higher in religious attendance ( $p < 0.05$ ). The Sobel-Goodman Test in Model 4 suggests that subjective life deprivation mediates 11.7%, 11.0%, 40.3% and 3.0% of the effects of social exclusion, political strain, chronic disease and income on religious attendance ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Model 5 reports the mediating effect of subjective life deprivation on religious salience. When subjective life deprivation is controlled in the model, the significant coefficients of social exclusion and political strain decline from 0.184 to 0.129, and 0.119

to 0.096 respectively. Meanwhile the subjective life deprivation is a significant contribution to religious salience. That is, one unite increase in subjective feeling of life deprivation multiplies the probability of reporting higher salience by 103%. The Sobel-Goodman Test in Model 6 suggests that subjective life deprivation mediates 23.3% and 23.5% respectively of the effect of social exclusion and political strain on religious salience ( $p < 0.001$ ).

### *Discussion and Conclusion*

Theoretically, this study revisits and develops the life deprivation theory on religious conversion and religious involvement. Specifically, I argue that life strains experienced by individuals would increase subjective feeling of life deprivation. To cope with these negative emotions, individuals increase the probability of religious conversion and religious involvement. Empirically, this study examines the updated version of the life deprivation theory on religious involvement in China using LDV model based on the China Family Panel Study. My findings suggest that social exclusion, political strain, physical disease as well as material deprivations are important reasons for higher religious involvement in China. Meanwhile subjective life deprivation is a significant mediator for the effects of life strains on religious involvement.

Table 2.4

*Regression Results of Subjective Deprivation on Religious Involvement*

Variables	Religious affiliation		Religious attendance		Religious salience	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Life strains</i>						
Discrimination	0.174**	23.3***	0.0631*	11.7***	0.129*	23.3** *
	-0.056		-0.027		-0.051	
Political strains	0.127**	22.7***	0.0664**	11.0***	0.0960*	23.5** *
	-0.049		-0.023		-0.045	
Chronic disease	0.164***	26.7***	0.0495*	40.3***	0.024	N.S.
	-0.049		-0.024		-0.046	
Divorced/widowed	0.086	N.S.	0.039	NS	0.037	N.S.
	-0.072		-0.034		-0.067	
Log(income)	-0.0178***	17.8***	-0.009***	3.0***	-0.004	N.S.
	-0.005		-0.002		-0.004	
<i>Controlled variables</i>						
Migration	-0.074		-0.0811*		-0.056	
	-0.081		-0.037		-0.073	
Religious affiliation 2012	1.661***		0.478***		0.549***	
	-0.075		-0.043		-0.068	
Religious attendance 2012	0.202***		0.499***		0.273***	
	-0.031		-0.014		-0.023	
Religious salience 2012	0.590***		0.352***		1.021***	
	-0.038		-0.021		-0.033	
<i>Mediating Effect</i>						
Subjective deprivation	0.0323***		0.00504*		0.029***	
	-0.005		-0.002		-0.004	
_cons	-2.600***		0.228			
	-0.262		-0.117			
Cut1_cons					2.828***	
					-0.216	
Cut2_cons					4.417***	
					-0.218	
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>			0.268			

Note: Standard errors in parentheses \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001; Other controlled variables include age, ethnicity, communist party membership, rural residence, education. Full results of the table upon requested only.

This study has four primary implications for advancing the understanding of religious involvement in modern society. First, this study extends the traditional understanding of the life deprivation theory and specifies the mechanisms of life strains affecting religious involvement. Previous studies tend to conceptualize the life deprivation narrowly either as subjective life deprivation or socioeconomic status (Christopher et al. 1971; Wimberley 1984), which consequently leads them to easily reject the life deprivation theory (Hoge and Carroll 1978; Norris and Inglehart 2011).

This study conceptualizes the life deprivation as objective forms of life strains that can happen randomly to individuals from various socioeconomic background, such as marital disruption, social discrimination, political strains, disease, and natural disaster. Even though some life strains such as material deprivation are highly correlated with socioeconomic status, other forms of life strains such as social change and political conflicts are not closely related with socioeconomic status. In some situations, people from the higher SES are more aware of the political strains. In this sense, this study argues that the specific life strains rather than the socioeconomic status directly motivate either social elites or the marginal for religious conversion and religious involvement.

In addition, this study specifies three mechanisms of life strains affecting religious involvement—materialistic strategy, existential security, and subject life deprivation. Many economists tend to explain the relationship between life strain and religious involvement from a rational choice perspective and argue that people embrace religious for practical and materialistic reasons. Some sociologists argue that life strains are related with religious involvement in a sense of searching for existential security. While recognizing these two mechanisms, this study emphasizes subjective life deprivation as

another important mechanism linking life strains and religious involvement in modern society—people with life strains develop subjective feelings of life deprivation and thus increase religious involvement for emotional coping.

The subjective life deprivation approach is significantly different from the mechanism of materialistic strategy and existential security. Even though the materialistic strategy and existential security approaches emphasize different aspects of religious function, both of them assume that secularization will come along with the advancement of economy, welfare system, and the improvement of public goods. Alternatively, the subjective life deprivation approach argues that religion will continue to function as a compensation for subjective deprivation in modern society as long as the subjective feelings of life deprivation sustains. Notably, subjective life deprivation wouldn't disappear in modern society if it is not increasing (Beck 1992). Thus, the potential implication of the subjective life deprivation approach is that religion will continue to recruit adherents of spiritual deprivation in modern society.

Third, this study provides empirical evidence for the life deprivation theory by using lagged dependent variable model on a longitudinal dataset. Previous studies examining the life deprivation theory tend to analyze the effect of life strains on religious involvement using multivariate regression on cross-sectional data, which usually fail to distinguish the reciprocal effect of life deprivation (both objective and subjective forms) and religious involvement. By controlling for previous waves of religiosity, this study is able to control for the causal effect of religiosity on life strains and subjective deprivation and, thus, to identify the causal effect of life strain on religious involvement.

Controlling for religiosity in previous wave of survey is particularly important to identify the causal effect of life strains on religious involvement in the second wave. As religion is marginalized and regulated in China, higher religious involvement is always related with higher exposure to political strains (if it is not with social strains) and higher subjective deprivation (Grim and Finke 2010). Thus controlling for previous wave of religiosity would effectively tease out the effect of religion on life strains and on subjective deprivation.

Finally, this study provides another perspective to understand the religious revival in the context of China. Over the past four decades, China has had a very significant increase of religious adherents along with unprecedented modernization (Stark and Wang 2015). This study highlights that individuals in this modern state are experiencing subjective feeling of deprivation. Subjective life deprivation not only is developed by material deprivation, but also has the societal and political dimensions. Particularly in China, social exclusion and political strain are two major motivators for individuals' religious involvement. These life strains, against the narrow version of the life deprivation theory (dealing with strategic material deprivation and existential security), wouldn't disappear in the modern society. Instead, economic growth in China is increasing the disparity of wealth, status and region (Zhou 2000). At the same time, tension between social members and political state sustains. Increased religious involvement, in this aspect, serves as a channel for individuals to cope with emotional life deprivation.

However, there are several limitations of this study. First, this study only investigates the effects of five particular forms of life strains on religious involvement—

social exclusion, political strain, chronic disease, marital disruption, and material deprivation. Other forms of life strains at individual level, such as conflicts with families and conflicts in social networks, should also be considered. More importantly, further studies should investigate the effect of communal and societal level of life strains such as social inequality, air pollution, and erosion of traditional culture on individuals' religious involvement.

As argued by this study, searching for compensation of their subjective deprivation is important for religious involvement, though this study did not substantially present how religious involvement can effectively cope with subjective deprivation in China. Will those people who convert to religion and increase religious involvement consequently find compensation for their subjective feeling deprivation and raise their subjective well-being in the next stage? As religion is regulated by the government, it is also possible that people will marginalize and polarize themselves through religious involvement and consequently amplify their subjective deprivation. Thus, further studies evaluating the coping effect of religion on subjective well-being in China should firstly control for the selection bias and causal effect of subjective deprivation on religious involvement.

Despite so many limitations, this study contributes to studies of religion theoretically by updating the life deprivation theory and empirically examining it in the context of China. My findings suggest that the life deprivation theory is still a very useful theory to understand religious conversion and religious involvement in modern society.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Religion and Deviance: A Moral Community Thesis

#### *Introduction*

The deterrent effect of religion on crime and deviance has been debated for more than thirty years since Hirschi and Stark (1969) failed to find empirical support for the “hellfire” hypothesis. While many studies found religion is inversely associated with various types of criminal and deviant behaviors (e.g., Benda 2002; Cochran and Akers 1989; Johnson 1987; Johnson et al. 2000, 2000; Johnson and Jang 2011; Marsiglia et al. 2005; Olson 1990), other studies found religion to be unrelated to crime and deviance, like Hirschi and Stark (Groves, Newman, and Corrado 1987; Heaton 2006; Hirschi and Stark 1969). Some suggested that the null finding showed the religion-crime relationship is spurious since it is fully attributable the individual’s neurological predisposition (Cochran, Wood, and Arneklev 1994; Ellis 1987:220; Ellis and Peterson 1996).

Other scholars, however, proposed explanations for the inconsistent findings. One key explanation was the moral community thesis proposed by Rodney Stark (Stark 1996; Stark, Kent, and Doyle 1982). According to the thesis, religion is rather “a group property” than “an individual trait.” Thus, the effect of religious context on crime and deviance is conceptually distinct from that of individual religiosity. Moreover, the effect of individual religiosity on deviance and crime is expected to be contingent upon the religiousness of context, namely, the proportion of people who are actively religious in the context.

Not all studies, however, provide empirical support for the hypothesis that religiosity at contextual level affects individual deviance and crime (Adamczyk and Hayes 2012; Ellis and Peterson 1996; Finke and Adamczyk 2008; Stack and Kposowa 2011). Also, previous findings are not consistent about whether religiosity at the contextual level moderates deviance and crime. Specifically, they differ on whether contextual-level religiosity enhances the effect of individual religiosity on crime and deviance (Adamczyk and Hayes 2012; Corcoran, Pettinicchio, and Robbins 2012; Regnerus 2003; Wallace et al. 2007). Besides, prior research focuses mostly on Western contexts, particularly the United States, which due to the influence of Judeo-Christian tradition is more likely have moral community than less religious non-Western contexts. To date, the moral community thesis has not been tested yet using data from non-Western societies.

To fill this gap in research, this study examines the relationship between an individual's religiosity, measured by affiliation with organized religion (called here "instituted religion"), and his or her violation of law and various rules in contemporary China. Specifically, this chapter applies multilevel logistic regression analysis to analyze two sets of nationally representative data to test (1) whether aggregate-level as well as individual-level religiosity is inversely related to behaviors in violation of the law and various conventional rules at the individual level and (2) whether the aggregate-level religiosity increases the prosocial effect of individual-level religiosity on the odds of violating the law and conventional rules. This study begins with an overview of moral community thesis and religion in China, followed by a review of literature on religion and deviance in Chinese contexts, Taiwan as well as mainland China. Next, I describe the

theoretical approach and hypotheses before turning to a description of data, measurement, and analytic strategy. Finally, I present results from multilevel logistic regression analysis and discuss implications of this study for the moral community thesis.

### *Moral Community Thesis*

The moral community thesis was originally proposed by Durkheim (1976) and then popularized by Rodney Stark (1996). When religiosity was found to have no association with delinquency in California and the Pacific Northwest (Burkett and White 1974; Hirschi and Stark 1969), unlike in Atlanta (Higgins and Albrecht 1977), Arizona (Jensen and Maynard 1979), Nashville (Rhodes and Reiss 1970), and among Mormons in Utah and Idaho (Albrecht, Chadwick, and Alcorn 1977), Stark (1996) proposed that the deterrent effect of individual religiosity on deviance and crime should be conditioned by the religiosity of broader social context, namely the proportion of people who are actively religious in a particular social context (Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982). For Stark (1996:164), religion is “a group property” rather than “an individual trait.” Thus, religion is expected to produce social conformity among individuals only when religion is accepted by the majority of the communities and becomes the norms for social interaction. Accordingly, in a community where religious commitment is a social norm, individual religiosity is likely to be negatively associated with delinquency. In contrast, in a non-religious or secular community, even the most devout individuals are as likely as their counterparts to be deviant as their religious consideration is not accepted or justified by their community as a social norm (Stark et al. 1982).

Since then, increasing number of studies have been conducted to test moral community thesis. In order to test the thesis, it is necessary first to examine whether

context-level religiosity is inversely related to individual-level deviance and crime, though the relationship is not the key argument of thesis. Most studies found significant association between religious context and individual deviance. For example, by applying multilevel analysis to cross-national data, studies found individuals living in more religious countries to have lower levels of premarital sex (Adamczyk and Hayes 2012), suicide acceptability (Stack and Kposowa 2011), and acceptance of white-collar crimes (Corcoran et al. 2012) than those in less religious countries. Also, American adolescents attending religious schools were less likely to smoke cigarettes than those in less religious schools (Bahr and Hoffmann 2008), and the risk of suicide attempts was found to be lower among youth living in neighborhoods that had higher proportion of religiously conservative residents in the United States (Maimon and Kuhl 2008). Furthermore, Regnerus (2003) found religious homogeneity rather than community religiousness at school- and county-level to generate an effective social control against delinquency (Regnerus 2003; Trawick and Howsen 2006). Adamczyk (2008:657), however, found neither generic religiosity nor conservative Protestant religious context to make a difference in women's decisions regarding abortion. According to Finke and Adamczyk (2008), religiosity at national level was among the most consistent predictors of the individual sexual morality, although it had no effect on the morality sanctioned by the state such as cheating on taxes, accepting a bribe, buying stolen goods, providing the government with false information, and avoiding to pay a public transportation fare.

The central argument of thesis concerns whether context-level religiosity affects the individual-level relationship between religiosity and deviance. That is, Stark (1996:165) argues that individual religiosity prohibits crime and deviance “only in

communities where the majority of people are actively religious.” In a secular context, he suggests the individual-level effect of religion on crimes and deviance would substantially decline and even disappear (Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982). As the thesis would have predicted, Corcoran et al. (2012) found religious context, measured in terms of belief in a personal and moral God, to increase the inverse relationship between individual religious belief, specifically, a belief in personal and moral God and acceptability of white-collar crimes. Scheepers et al.’s cross-national study (2002) also showed that the effect of individual religiosity on moral attitudes (toward abortion, premarital and extramarital relationships, and homosexual relations) tended to be stronger in more religious countries than in less religious or more secularized countries. In addition, using large representative sample of American public high schools, Wallace et al. (2007) found that the adolescents attending highly religious schools were less likely to use alcohol, tobacco and marijuana than their equally religious peers attending less religious schools.

While Regnerus (2003) reported that religiosity at school- and county-level interacted with individual religiosity (religious affiliation) in reducing delinquency, he also suggested that religious homogeneity at a contextual level rather than religiosity interacts with individual religiosity reducing theft. Similarly, Ovadia and Moor (2010) found the percentage of evangelical Protestants in a county to be positively associated with the teen birth rate, whereas the percentage of Catholics was negatively associated, although the percentage of the religious adherents in a county was not related to the birth rate.

However, many researchers failed to find evidence of the moral community thesis. For example, using data on suicide in Netherlands from 1936 to 1973, Van Tubergen et al. (2005) found that community-level religiosity can protect not only religious members of all denominations but also religious nones from suicide. Cochran and Akers (1989:92) only found “minor” support for Stark’s moral community thesis. That is, they didn’t find significant interactions between aggregate religiosity and the effect of individual religiosity on alcohol and marijuana use. However, they did find that personal asceticism significantly affects alcohol use only in highly religious contexts and disappears in contexts with low levels of religiosity. Thus, some have argued that the significant relationship between religion and delinquency at the individual level “may not have as much to do with where (or in what social context) we measure it as with how we attempt to measure it” (Junger and Polder 1993; Sloane and Potvin 1986:103). In a meta-analysis of 60 studies, Baier and Wright (2001) found religious beliefs and behaviors to have a moderate deterrent effect on individuals’ criminal behaviors, but the effect was not contingent upon contextual religiousness (Baier and Wright 2001). Benda and Corwyn (2001) rejected Stark’s thesis based on the evidence that an inverse relationship between religion and crime exists in the irreligious East coast as well as in the South. These findings suggest that the effect of individual religiosity on deviance and crime is not conditioned by the religiousness of the context.

Likewise, Welch, Tittle and Petee (1991) found a significant negative effect from both individual and parish-level religiosity on adult deviance, yet no significant interaction between the two was found. Similarly, Bahr and Hoffmann (2008:743) found that “the associations between individual religiosity and the four types of drug use were

not affected by the level of school religiosity.” Applying hierarchical modeling to cross-national data, Adamczyk and Hayes (2012) also found no significant cross-level interaction, while individual religious affiliation and the percent of Muslim residents at a country level both decreased the odds of premarital sex. Examining several deviant outcomes, Sturgis and Baller (2012) also failed to find significant interactions between contextual religiousness and the effect of individual religiosity on anti-asceticism. In sum, these studies indicate that individual and contextual religiosity tend to affect deviance independently.

Furthermore, Tittle and Welch (1983) even found the opposite of what Stark’s moral community thesis posits, although they relied on a proxy measure of aggregate religiosity constructed using individual-level survey data. That is, they reported that the inverse relationship between individual religiosity and self-estimated probability of future deviance was more likely to be significant when the proxy of aggregative religiosity was relatively low rather than high. To explain this unexpected finding, they speculated that religion might have been likely to “distinctly affect conformity only where the larger environment lacks the mechanisms that normally curtail deviance.” (Tittle and Welch 1983:674) Yet this finding needs to be interpreted with caution given the limited measurement of two key variables: contextual religiosity and deviance. That is, their measure of context-level religiosity based on the aggregation of individual religiosity may not be necessarily representative of the context, and the behavioral intention of future deviance may not be a good indicator of actual deviance.

Besides their mixed results, most of previous studies have examined the effect of moral community on deviance and crime in the Western and particularly U.S. context,

where the Judeo-Christian tradition exists (Regnerus 2003; Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982; Tittle and Welch 1983; Wallace et al. 2007). Few studies have examined the moral community thesis in non-western context, especially a society where religion is marginalized and regulated by the state. Previous researchers have suggested that the prosocial effect of religion on deviance and crimes should substantially diminish and even disappear in a secular social context because moral community is unlikely to exist to strengthen individual religiosity (Corcoran et al. 2012; Stark 1996, 2001; Stark et al. 1982). Some have even argued that when certain religions are persecuted by the government, these religious groups would increase their grievance against the state and the broader society who did not support their agenda (Grim and Finke 2007; Hafez 2004). To address this understudied issue, this study intends to examine the moral community thesis in the context of China, where religion is regulated and even repressed in a secular society (Grim and Finke 2006, 2007; Potter 2003; Yang 2011). Thus, a description of brief history and current state of religion in China is in order.

### *Religion in China*

While different religions compete in a free market in the United States (Finke and Stark 2005), religion in China is marginalized and even persecuted by the government (Grim and Finke 2006, 2007; Potter 2003; Yang 2011). Historically, agnostic Confucianism is the cultural bedrock of secular orthodoxy (Creel 1932; Sun 2013; Weber and Gerth 1953; Yang 1961). After the Communist Party of China took power in 1949, Marxism-based atheism has remained the official ideology of China (Cao 2012; Yang 2004) and continues to monitor and restrict religious activities.

Since the Economic Reform in 1978, however, the communist government has decreased its restrictions on religion, which initiated an intense growth of religion along with social and economic transitions (Potter 2003; Stark and Wang 2015; Yang 2005, 2011). Despite such growth, a large majority of the general population in China holds an atheistic or agnostic view with only a small percentage of Chinese population professing a religion. For example, while the 2007 Spiritual Life Study of Chinese Residents found 23 percent of participants to report their religious affiliation, the 2010 China General Social Survey (CGSS) revealed that only 13 percent of the population reported that they have certain religious affiliations. Similarly, according to the World Value Survey conducted in 2012, only 14.7 percent of respondents were members of a particular religion. According to the 2010 CGSS, 5.5 percent of the survey respondents identified Buddhism as their religion, 2.2 percent Christianity, 2.4 percent Islam, .2 percent Taoism, and 2.3 percent folk religion.

Given its marginal social position in a secular society, many scholars have speculated that religion has no positive effect on morality or general trust in Chinese society (Hu 2013; Stark 2001). Even fewer studies have examined whether religion in China affects crime and deviance and promotes social conformity. At micro level, the religion-deviance link in China is quite understudied, while most studies to date suggest no relationship or even positive association between religion and deviance. For example, religion is found to be positively associated with suicide attempts among both college students and rural women in China (Zhang and Jin 1996; Zhang and Xu 2007; Zhao et al. 2012).

Cross-national studies usually consider China a generally secular nation where religion barely has any social influence. For example, by comparing data from China, Taiwan, and the U.S., Zhang and Thomas (1994) found that religion in both China and Taiwan doesn't increase social conformity among college students, perhaps because social conformity is primarily promoted by the Confucian tradition. Meanwhile, Stark (2001:620) asserts that "the moral behaviors of individuals would be influenced by their religious commitments only in societies where the dominant religious organizations give clear and consistent expression to divine moral imperatives." In China, meanwhile, Confucianism and the dominant religions—Taoism, Buddhism, and folk religion—are somewhat amalgamated. In other words, gods of these religions are borrowed from each other, sometimes sharing the same teachings with one another (Shahar and Weller 1996). Consequently, religious beliefs and practices in China are likely to have little effect on moral judgments as those gods are "of very limited power and scope and usually lack moral concern and even dignity" (Stark 2001).

These studies, however, have three major limitations. First, they failed to differentiate organized religions from folk religions despite their potential differences in affecting deviance. On the one hand, folk religions have very diverse and even inconsistent beliefs and practices (Dean 2003; Tamney 1998; F. Yang 2010), whereas organized religions, also called "instituted" religions by Yang (1961), have developed systems of religious orthodoxy, moral norms, ritual practice, and professional clergies or religious institutions distinct from secular social life. On the other hand, in instituted religions, especially Christianity and Islam, there are "all-powerful, all-seeing gods ruling the entire universe as the ultimate deterrent" (Stark 2001:621). Therefore, individuals can

develop higher morality and moral behaviors with a conception of powerful and moral God in mind (Corcoran et al. 2012).

In contrast, innumerable gods and deities exist in folk religions, many of which are shared by or borrowed from each other (Dean 2003; Shahar and Weller 1996). Having folk religion seldom implies “a long-standing, deeply-felt relationship with a god but merely involves requests for favors from various divinities of small scope” (Stark 2001:634). Consequently, folk religions have limited power and scope in influencing individuals’ morality. Instead, they function as a placebo for the self-centered and self-serving individuals (Stark 2001). Thus, folk religions in China are less likely to prohibit crimes and deviance than instituted religions that have systematic teachings and a conception of the highly power God.

Second, those studies failed to consider that the levels of religious regulation may vary not only across religions but also among regions. Under state regulation, a triple religious market exists in contemporary China: (1) a “red market” approved by the government, (2) a “black market” banned by the government, and (3) a “grey market” ambiguously treated by the government (Yang 2006). The organized religions of Christianity (both Protestantism and Catholicism), Islam, Buddhism, and Taoism are in the red market recognized by the government, whereas Falun Gong, Eastern Lightening and other new religions are in the black market forbidden by the government (Chan 2004). On the other hand, various types of folk religions (i.e., sectarian, communal, and individual folk religions) have been thriving in grey market due to their ambiguous legal status (Dean 2003; Wenger 2004; Yang and Hu 2012).

Although the central government of China regulates and even persecutes religion in general across the country, the development of religion is highly dependent on the daily interactions and negotiations between religious organizations and local government (Koesel 2014). For example, Cao's (2010) ethnographic study of Wenzhou Christians demonstrates how Christian leaders cooperate with local authorities, and Wang and Ya's (2015) study describes in detail how the Three-self Church succeeded in expanding their influence by establishing a stable relationship with the local officials. In addition, some local governments would decrease religious regulation and even provide opportunities for the growth of religion when they try to help local economies thrive by using local religious resources (Feuchtwang 2010; Koesel 2014; Palmer and Wickeri 2011). This phenomenon is referred to as "building a religious stage for an economic opera" in China as religion provides a platform to develop local economy. Thus a variation in the level of religious regulation is likely to exist across provinces, though no empirical research has examined this phenomenon yet.

Third, despite a small percentage of religious adherents in the total population, activities and practices of different religions tend to concentrate in different parts of China. As described by Wickeri (2011:3), "Buddhists visit a popular temple in east China to burn incense or to ask the monks to conduct special service for their families. Villagers gather at festival time to usher in the lunar New Year and perform a communal sacrifice to the local gods [in Southeastern China]. Muslims in far Western China proceed to their neighborhood mosque five times a day for prayers.... Tibetan Monks demonstrate for religious freedom in a small city outside Lhasa." Protestant Christians are highly concentrated in Henan, Anhui, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Fujian, and Yunnan province (Stark and

Wang 2015; Ying 2009), forming three major “Bible Belts” in China (Yu 2008): Huai River Basin Bible Belt (Henan, Anhui and Norther Jiangsu); Minzhe costal Bible Belt (Fujian and Zhejiang); and Shaanxi-Yunan Bible Belt (Shaanxi and Yunnan). Due to its long history of missionary work, Catholicism in China is highly concentrated in North China, especially in Hebei and Tianjin (Madsen 1998). Muslims are highly concentrated in Northwestern China, including Xinjiang, Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai Province (Davis 2008; Gladney 1996), while Tibetan Buddhists are the majority of the population in Tibet. On the other hand, Southeast China, such as Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangxi Provinces are famous for their various folk religions (Dean 2003; Palmer and Wickeri 2011).

The concentration of a particular religion, especially homogeneous instituted religions, in a certain region may: (1) generate and influence shared social norms among individuals in that region through social interactions, rites, and rituals (Durkheim 1926; Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982); (2) internalize individuals with the conception of powerful, morally conscious god(s) (Corcoran et al. 2012; Stark 2001); and (3) provide dense networks and social capital that enhance civic engagement, social trust, and social and psychological support and control for community members (Lee 2006; Lee and Bartkowski 2004; Regnerus 2003; Tsai 2007). Hence, in this study, we intend to examine whether instituted religion at provincial level shapes a moral community that alters the effect of individual religiosity on law and rule violation.

However, we will not examine folk religion for two reasons. First, there is no data available to measure the presence of folk religion at provincial level. Second, we do not believe that folk religions are able to shape a moral community for individuals in secular

China because folk religions (1) are unlikely to generate a common moral order for individuals because of their numerous gods and deities (Corcoran et al. 2012; Stark 2001); (2) lack a systematic orthodoxy and structures to constrain individual behaviors (Yang 1961); and (3) serve primarily as a utilitarian tool for self-centered and self-serving individuals (Chen 1995; Stark 2001; Wang and Jang forthcoming).

### *Hypotheses*

Taken together, focusing on province as aggregate unit, we test the following hypotheses.

H1: Individual religiosity is inversely related to deviance.

H2: Province-level religiosity is inversely related to individual-level deviance.

H3: Province-level of religiosity moderates—specifically, increases—the inverse relationship between individual-level religiosity and deviance.

### *Methods*

#### *Data*

Data used in this study comes from multiple sources: the 2010 Wave of China General Social Survey (henceforth, CGSS 2010) and the Spatial Explorer of Religions, collected between 2002 and 2004. First, the CGSS 2010 resembles the General Social Survey of the United States and includes a series of questions about deviant behaviors, such as violation of the law and government, workplace, organization, and transportation rules. A multistage sampling design was used to obtain a nationally representative sample of individuals from each of 22 provinces and four Municipalities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing). The first 100 counties (or districts) were selected randomly

across China, while five major cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen) were treated as the primary sampling unit. Second, from each county, four communities or villages were randomly drawn. Then 25 households were randomly selected from each community, and, finally, one individual, age 18 or older, was randomly chosen from each household. From the five major cities, a total of 80 communities were randomly selected. In the end, 480 communities of administrative units and villages were selected, and the total sample size of individual respondents was 11,770.

Second, province-level religiosity is measured based on data from the Spatial Explorer of Religions, made available by the China Data Center at Michigan University <sup>3</sup>. The Spatial Explorer of Religion provides number of religious sites of Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam that existed in 31 provinces during the period of 2002-2004 (Bao, Wang, and Shui 2014). Third, income inequality at provincial level was measured using the Theil Index, published by Lu and Xu (2004), while the index were not available for four municipalities: Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing. Fourth, population density is calculated using the total population from 2010 China Census data and the size of each province provided by Chinese government <sup>4</sup>. Fifth, the percentages for the communist party members in each province is clustered by the self-reported communist party member in China GSS 2010. Finally, other provincial characteristics

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<sup>3</sup> The link to the website: <http://chinadataonline.org/religionexplorer/religion40/#>; accessed on 2016-05-20.

<sup>4</sup> Administrative Divisions of People's Republic of China, from Chinese government website: [http://www.gov.cn/test/2005-06/15/content\\_18253.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2005-06/15/content_18253.htm), accessed on May 24th, 2016.

such as illiteracy rate, urbanization rate, GDP per capita, and ethnic composition were obtained from the 2010 China Census data.

As mentioned above, we focus only on instituted religion, so followers of folk religion were excluded from our analysis. In addition, Tibet is dropped because the unit contained less than 30 valid cases. As a result, the final sample consisted of 9,528 valid cases from 25 provinces.

### *Measurement*

*Dependent Variables.* This study uses five items to measure the violation of conventional authority: the law, transportation rules, the government rules, workplace rules, and other organizational rules: “How often do you obey the law/transportation rule/government rule/workplace rule/organizational rule?” (1 = not at all, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = very often, 5 = always). The response categories are reversed-coded so a higher score represents more frequent violation. As anticipated for a general population, the items’ distributions are highly skewed. For example, 69.2 percent of respondents reported that they never violated the law, whereas the remaining 30.8 percent said they did rarely (29.0%), sometimes (1.3%), very often (.3%), or always (.2%). To address this skewness, the item is dichotomized: 0 = no violation and 1 = violation. For the same reason, four items of rule violation are also dichotomized <sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Likewise, 63.3 percent respondents reported that they had never violated the government rule, whereas 36.7 percent said that they did rarely (33.2%), sometimes (2.8%), very often (.4) or always (.3). Almost 60 percent (58.2%) respondents reported that they had never violated the transportation rule, whereas 41.8 percent said that they did rarely (36.3%), sometimes (3.8%), very often (.1.3) or always (.4). About the same majority (60.4%) reported that they had never violated the workplace rule at all, while 35.2, 3.2, .7 and .5 percent reported they did very rarely, sometimes, very often and always, respectively. Similarly, 65.5, 31.6, 2.2, .3,3 percent reported that they had never violated organization rules, very rarely, sometimes, very often or always, respectively.

*Individual-level Independent Variables.* Religious affiliation is used to measure an individual's religiosity. Specifically, respondents who identified themselves as Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or Muslim are all coded as 1 with those who identified as "religious none" being coded as 0. To control for various sources of spuriousness, this study construct sociodemographic variables: age, gender (0 = male, 1 = female), ethnicity (0 = Han majority, 1 = non-Han minority), education (0 = no education, 1 = elementary school, 2 = middle school, 3 = high school, 4 = Junior college; 5 = college and above), annual personal income (logged), employment status (0 = employed, 1 = unemployed), marital status (0 = single, divorced, separated, or widowed, 1 = married), place of residence (0 = rural 1 = urban), and Community Party membership (0 = no, 1 = yes).

*Provincial-level Independent Variables.* To measure aggregate-level religiosity, the number of religious sites (including Buddhist temples, Taoist temples, churches, and mosques) per 10,000 residents of each province was calculated. There are two reasons to use the rate of religious sites. One is the lack of data available to measure the percentage of people affiliated with instituted religion in each province, and the other is the expectation that a higher percent of residents with religious affiliation in a province would lead to a higher number of religious sites in the province, which makes the rate of religious sites a reasonable measure of province-level religiosity.

GDP per capita of 2010 is used to measure the level of economic development of each province, and illiteracy rate was employed as a measure of province's educational level. Another measure of province-level socioeconomic status, the Theil Index (which is similar to Gini Index) is included in analysis to control for income inequality within province. The urbanization rate is operationalized by the percentage of urban population

in each province in 2010, whereas the total population of province was measured in units of 10,000 people. Finally, this study measures ethnic heterogeneity in terms of the percentage of ethnic minority (i.e., non-Han) residents in province and constructs a variable of percent Community Party members in province given its significance in China.

### *Analytic Strategy*

To simultaneously account for the interdependence of individuals within the same social context and model both provincial-level and individual-level variance on deviance, this study conducts multilevel mixed-effects logistic regression analysis (Raudenbush et al. 2004). Thus, in the model individual deviant behaviors are explained by both individual and provincial characteristics. At the micro-level, where  $\log(p_{ia}/(1-p_{ia}))$  is the log odds of individual  $i$  in a province  $a$  reporting law or rule violation.

$$\ln \frac{p_{ia}}{(1-p_{ia})} = \beta_{0j} + \sum_{j=1}^{Nj} \beta_{ja} (X_{jia} - \overline{X_{jia}}) + r_{ia}$$

$X_{jia}$  is a vector of  $j$  individual-level variables (such as age, personal income and gender) describing individual  $i$  from province  $a$ . The micro-level  $\beta_{ja}$  (including the intercepts  $\beta_{0a}$ ) are then modeled at the macro –level as

$$\beta_{ja} = \gamma_{j0} + \sum_{j=1}^{Nj} \gamma_{jm} (Z_{ma} - \overline{X_{ma}}) + v_{ja}$$

Where  $Z_{ma}$  is a vector of  $m$  provincial-level variables (such as GDP per capita) describing province  $a$ .

In the first model—the individual-level model—the relationship between individual religiosity and the odds of violating the law or rule is examined, taking the

variance at the individual and provincial level into account. In the second model—the context-level model—the relationship between province-level religiosity and individual-level deviance is estimated, controlling for province-level sociodemographic characteristics, while also taking into account the variance at the individual and the province levels. The third model—the multi-level model—investigates whether community-level and the individual-level religiosity are related to individual-level violation of conventional authority controlling for both provincial and individual characteristics. The fourth model—the cross-level interactive model—examine whether the strength of the relationship between individual-level religiosity and deviance increases as the religiosity of province increases by testing whether the random slope for the cross-level interactions was significant. In the previous models, we fix the random slopes because I am interested in the extent to which the mean level of deviance varies across provinces. The final model intend to examine whether there is statistically significant cross-level interaction between individual and community religiosity (i.e., whether the effect of individual religiosity on the odds of violating the law and rules was strengthened by the religious context), for which the random slope for the individual religiosity is added.<sup>6</sup>

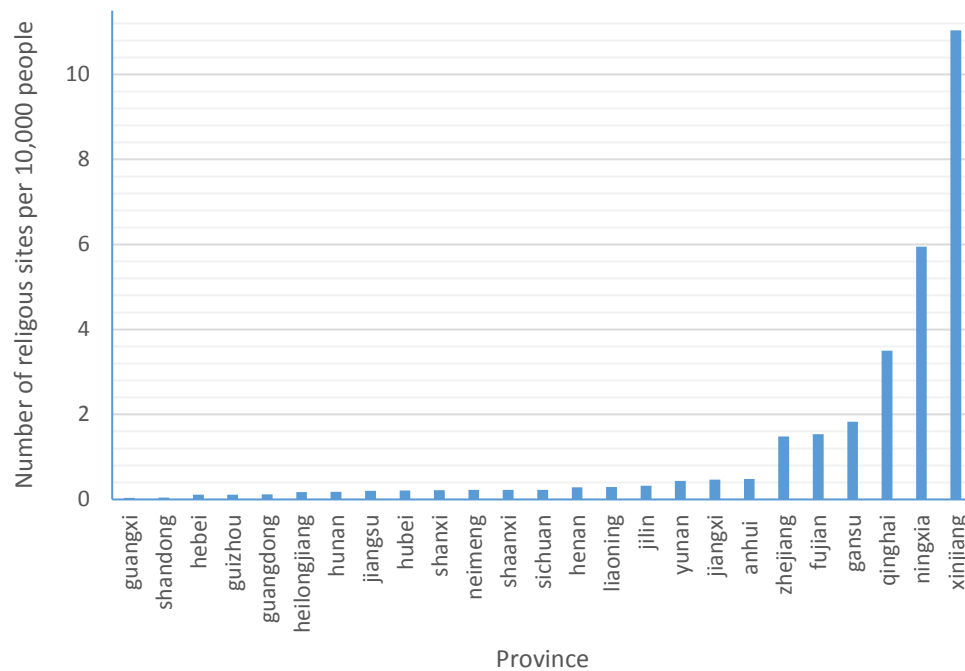
### *Results*

Descriptive statistics of variables included in analysis are summarized in Table 3.6. About ten percent (10.9%) of the final sample are affiliated with instituted religion,

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<sup>6</sup> Since we were interested primarily in estimating the dichotomous slope model (affiliation of instituted religion), we did not center the variables that are not dichotomous around a group or grand mean (Kreft, Kreft, and Leeuw 1998; Regnerus 2003).

and less than half of them answer affirmatively the questions about violating the law and rules, ranging from 31.8 percent (law violation) to 43.1 percent (transportation rule violation). Survey respondents are, on average, about 49 years old (48.838), and the sample is 51.9 percent female, 9.0 percent ethnic minority (i.e., non-Han), 81.0 percent married, 43.1 percent urban residents, 6.0 percent unemployed, and 11.4 percent Community Party members.



*Figure 3.1. Number of Religious Sites Per 10,000 People in 25 Provinces in China*

The average number of religious sites in China is less than one (.575) per 10,000 people, confirming that China was a highly secular country. The aggregate-level religiosity, however, varies across provinces, ranging from .036 (Guangxi) to 11.039 (Xinjiang), which suggests that these religious minorities are highly concentrated geographically (See Figure 4.1). The average GDP per capita was 25,638.77 RMB ( $\approx$ \$3,845.82) with the minimum and maximum being 10,301.95 RMB ( $\approx$ \$1,586.92) and

44,604.92 RMB ( $\approx$ \$6,862.30), and economic inequality, measured by the Theil index also varies across provinces, from .063 (Zhejiang) to .489 (Guangdong). The average proportion of urban population in province is 46.9 (46.873) percent with the minimum and maximum being 29.9 percent (Guizhou) and 63.4 percent (Guangdong), respectively. While the illiteracy rate is on average, 7.2 percent, ranging from 3.2 percent (Liaoning) to 15.9 percent (Gansu), whereas the percentage of ethnic minorities in province varies widely across provinces, from .3 percent (Jiangxi) to 59.4 percent (Xinjiang). Finally, the percentage of Communist Party members in province is, on average, 11.4 percent, ranging from 7.0 percent (Hebei) to 25.3 percent (Qinghai).

Table 3.1 presents results from estimating logistic regression models that include only the individual-level independent variables. Being consistent with Hypothesis 1, respondents affiliated with instituted religions are found to report significantly lower odds of violating the law ( $-.276$ ), workplace rule ( $-.233$ ), government rule ( $-.226$ ), organizational rule ( $-.229$ ) and transportation rule ( $-.306$ ) compared with their religious-none counterparts. That is, an individual's religiosity, whether affiliated with Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or Taoism, is inversely related to the individual's odds of violating the law and rules. Contrary to some of previous findings that religion had no protective effect on deviance in China (Stark 2001; Zhang and Thomas 1994; Zhang and Xu 2007), this study finds instituted religion to have the hypothesized effect of social conformity, a virtue that is also emphasized by the Confucian ethic.

Table 3.1

*Religious Affiliation as Individual Control: the Individual Influence Hypothesis*  
(Individual N=8,224; Province N=25)

Variables	(1) Violating the law	(2) Violating workplace rule	(3) Violating government rule	(4) Violating organizational rule	(5) Violating transportation rule
Instituted religion	-.276** (.092)	-.233** (.086)	-.226** (.086)	-.229** (.088)	-.306** (.083)
Ethnic minority	.357** (.100)	.322** (.098)	.309** (.097)	.295** (.100)	.323** (.095)
Urban resident	-.222** (.062)	-.229** (.059)	-.158** (.059)	-.228** (.061)	-.165** (.058)
Age	-.008** (.002)	-.008** (.002)	-.010** (.002)	-.008** (.002)	-.007** (.002)
Female	-.098* (.053)	-.051 (.050)	-.073 (.050)	-.124** (.053)	-.075 (.049)
Education	-.067** (.027)	-.082** (.026)	-.020 (.026)	-.047* (.026)	-.076** (.025)
Married	-.032 (.066)	-.093 (.063)	-.095 (.063)	-.073 (.064)	-.106* (.061)
Unemployment	-.194* (.109)	.071 (.102)	.109 (.101)	-.019 (.104)	.044 (.100)
Income (logged)	-.031** (.008)	-.044** (.008)	-.034** (.008)	-.028** (.008)	-.032** (.008)
Communist party	-.240** (.089)	-.287** (.083)	-.365** (.084)	-.393** (.087)	-.223** (.080)
Intercept	.013 (.189)	.677** (.169)	.366** (.172)	.177 (.185)	.635** (.165)
Province Intercept	.295** (.095)	.167** (.053)	.199** (.064)	.286** (.091)	.160** (.050)
ICC	8.23%	4.84%	5.69%	7.99%	4.63%

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are reported; \* p < .05(one-tailed test), \*\* p < .05(two-tailed test).

Besides this key finding, sociodemographic variables are generally found to have significant relationships with the law and rule violations in the expected directions. For example, ethnic minority respondents report higher odds of violating the law and rules compared to their peers of Han ethnicity, which might have been due in part to their lack of assimilation into the Han-centric norms of China (Shahar and Weller 1996). Also, respondents of older age and higher education and income are less likely to violate the law and various rules than those of younger age and lower education and income, one

exception being the education-government rule relationship ( $-.020, p > .05$ ). In addition, females are less likely to violate the law and organizational rule than males, although they are not different in the odds of violating rules of workplace, government, and transportation. The anticipated protective effect of marriage is found only for the violation of transportation rules. On the other hand, contrary to our expectation, urban residents are less likely to commit law and rule violations than their non-urban counterparts, and unemployment is inversely related to law violation. Finally, respondents who have membership with the Communist Party are less likely to commit deviance of all measures than those who are not Community Party member.

Table 3.2 shows models of contextual variables only, estimated as the baseline model of moral community thesis. Being consistent with Hypothesis 2, aggregate-level religiosity, that is, the number of religious sites per 10,000 people in province is inversely related to the individual-level violation of the law ( $-.160$ ), workplace rule ( $-.112$ ), government rule ( $-.137$ ), organizational rule ( $-.126$ ), and transportation rule ( $-.092$ ), controlling for provincial characteristics. Besides, economic development (GDP per capita) is inversely related to the law and rule violation with one exception (i.e., transportation rule violation). Population size, percent of communist party members, economic inequality, illiteracy rate, and percent of ethnic minorities, however, are not associated with any of the measures of deviance, while province's urbanization rate is positively related to the odds of violating government rules, as anticipated.

Table 3.2

*Religious as Contextual Control: the Moral Communities Hypothesis (Individual  
N=8,224; Province N=25)*

Variables	(1) Violating the law	(2) Violating workplace rule	(3) Violating government rule	(4) Violating organizational rule	(5) Violating transportation rule
Religious sites per 10,000 people	-.160** (.051)	-.112** (.043)	-.137** (.044)	-.126** (.051)	-.092** (.043)
Total population	.109 (6.505)	-1.193 (5.536)	1.502 (5.703)	1.65 (6.68)	-4.044 (5.685)
Percent of communist	.325 (2.257)	1.929 (1.894)	1.677 (1.954)	.445 (2.320)	1.728 (1.942)
GDP per capita (10,000 RMB)	-.400* (.208)	-.340* (.178)	-.368** (.183)	-.404* (.214)	-.150 (.183)
Urbanization rate	.041 (.026)	.025 (.022)	.038* (.023)	.033 (.026)	-.001 (.022)
Theil Index	-.818 (.960)	-.119 (.813)	-.091 (.837)	-.501 (.988)	.817 (.837)
Illiteracy rate	-.034 (.029)	-.023 (.024)	-.018 (.025)	-.045 (.029)	-.035 (.025)
Percent of ethnic minority	.008 (.008)	.003 (.007)	.009 (.007)	.004 (.008)	.004 (.007)
Intercept	-1.370 (.986)	-.629 (.833)	-1.476* (.858)	-.809 (1.010)	.201 (.852)
Province intercept	.133** (.045)	.094** (.031)	.100** (.034)	.143** (.048)	.102** (.032)
ICC	3.90%	2.77%	2.95%	4.17%	3.00%

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are reported; \* p < .05(one-tailed test), \*\* p < .05(two-tailed test).

Table 3.3 reports results from estimating multi-level models that contain both individual-level and province-level independent variables, including individual and provincial religiosity hypothesized to explain the deviance of law and rule violations, without cross-level interactions of religiosity. Controlling for both individual and provincial sociodemographic characteristics, this study finds that both individual-level and province-level religiosity remain inversely related to the violation of law (–.234 and –.167), workplace rules (–.200 and –.103), government rules (–.184 and –.153), organizational rules (–.193 and –.132), and transportation rules (–.287 and –.084), while

the odds become somewhat smaller as the sociodemographic variables explain partly the deviant behaviors (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

Statistical significance of relationships between other independent variables and deviance also remained the same with three exceptions where non-significant relationships become significant. Two of them involved percent Community Party members in province, which are positively associated with government and transportation rule violation (3.805 and 3.342, respectively). The positive association is an interesting finding given the negative relationship between individual-level Community Party membership and deviance. The other exception is urbanization rate, which is positively associated with violation of the law (.043) as well as government rule (.038), although it is significantly related only to the latter in the contextual model (see Table 3.2).

Finally, Table 3.4 shows results from estimating multilevel models that included cross-level interactions between individual and provincial religiosity, where none of the interaction terms to be significant, failing to find support for Hypothesis 3 that the provincial religiosity should increase the effect of individual religiosity on law and rule violations. That is, the effect of an individual's affiliation with instituted religion on law- and rule-violating behaviors do not vary across provinces with different numbers of religious sites. Positively stated, individual religiosity is a protective factor for deviance regardless of the religiousness of province in China.

Table 3.3

*Religion as Individual and Contextual Control (Individual N=8,224; province N=25)*

Variables	(1) Violating the law	(2) Violating workplace rule	(3) Violating government rule	(4) Violating organizational rule	(5) Violating transportation rule
Instituted religion	-.234** (.092)	-.200** (.086)	-.184** (.086)	-.193** (.088)	-.287** (.084)
Ethnic minority	.405** (.101)	.364** (.100)	.361** (.099)	.342** (.101)	.341** (.097)
Urban resident	-.214** (.062)	-.223** (.059)	-.151** (.059)	-.222** (.061)	-.163** (.058)
Age	-.008** (.002)	-.008** (.002)	-.0100** (.0019)	-.008** (.002)	-.007** (.002)
Female	-.100* (.053)	-.053 (.050)	-.0748 (.0502)	-.126** (.052)	-.076 (.049)
Education	-.070** (.027)	-.085** (.026)	-.0239 (.0257)	-.050* (.026)	-.078** (.025)
Married	-.034 (.066)	-.094 (.063)	-.0958 (.0626)	-.074 (.064)	-.107* (.061)
Unemployment	-.197* (.109)	.069 (.102)	.107 (.101)	-.021 (.104)	.042 (.100)
Income (logged)	-.030** (.008)	-.043** (.008)	-.034** (.008)	-.027** (.008)	-.031** (.008)
Communist party	-.235** (.089)	-.284** (.083)	-.361** (.084)	-.389** (.087)	-.222** (.080)
<u>Contextual Level</u>					
Religious sites per 10,000 people	-.167** (.052)	-.103** (.044)	-.153** (.045)	-.132** (.052)	-.084* (.045)
Total population	-1.875 (6.300)	-2.511 (5.427)	-.978 (5.469)	-.399 (6.474)	-4.824 (5.875)
Percent of communist	3.189 (2.202)	4.190** (1.874)	3.805** (1.893)	3.178 (2.266)	3.342* (2.024)
GDP per capita (10,000 RMB)	-.400** (.202)	-.337* (.175)	-.346** (.176)	-.406* (.208)	-.160 (.189)
Urbanization rate	.043* (.025)	.028 (.022)	.038* (.022)	.034 (.026)	.003 (.023)
Theil Index	-.720 (.929)	.067 (.796)	-.003 (.801)	-.370 (.955)	.919 (.867)
Illiteracy rate	-.033 (.028)	-.017 (.024)	-.010 (.024)	-.041 (.029)	-.029 (.026)
Percent of ethnic minority	.000 (.008)	-.002 (.007)	.002 (.007)	-.004 (.008)	-.001 (.008)
Intercept	-.738 (.968)	.078 (.827)	-.758 (.836)	-.172 (.990)	.801 (.892)
Province intercept	.120** (.041)	.086** (.029)	.087** (.030)	.129** (.044)	.107** (.035)
ICC	3.51%	2.56%	2.59%	3.78%	3.15%

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are reported; \* p < .05(one-tailed test), \*\* p < .05(two-tailed test).

Table 3.4

*Individual and Contextual Interaction Model*  
(Individual N=8,224; province N=25)

Variables	(1) Violating the law	(2) Violating workplace rule	(3) Violating government rule	(4) Violating organization al rule	(5) Violating transportatio n rule
<u>Individual Level</u>					
Instituted religion (A)	-.293** (.106)	-.273** (.097)	-.267** (.100)	-.244** (.101)	-.302** (.091)
Ethnic minority	.401** (.101)	.352** (.100)	.352** (.099)	.338** (.101)	.337** (.098)
Urban resident	-.215** (.062)	-.224** (.059)	-.152** (.059)	-.222** (.061)	-.163** (.058)
Age	-.008** (.002)	-.008** (.002)	-.010** (.002)	-.008** (.002)	-.007** (.002)
Female	-.099* (.053)	-.051 (.050)	-.074 (.050)	-.125** (.052)	-.075 (.049)
Education	-.070** (.027)	-.084** (.026)	-.024 (.026)	-.050* (.026)	-.078** (.025)
Married	-.034 (.066)	-.094 (.063)	-.096 (.063)	-.074 (.064)	-.107* (.061)
Unemployment	-.197* (.109)	.068 (.102)	.106 (.101)	-.022 (.104)	.041 (.100)
Income (logged)	-.030** (.008)	-.043** (.008)	-.034** (.008)	-.027** (.008)	-.031** (.008)
Communist party	-.234** (.089)	-.282** (.083)	-.359** (.084)	-.387** (.087)	-.221** (.080)
<u>Contextual Level</u>					
Religious sites per 10,000 people (B)	-.253** (.097)	-.196** (.075)	-.269** (.086)	-.206** (.088)	-.101* (.060)
Total population	-3.033 (6.272)	-3.754 (5.408)	-2.525 (5.446)	-1.402 (6.395)	-5.047 (5.883)
Percent of communist	3.957* (2.276)	5.009** (1.921)	4.818** (1.961)	3.854* (2.308)	3.489* (2.049)
GDP per capita (10,000 RMB)	-.395** (.199)	-.331* (.172)	-.340** (.173)	-.401** (.203)	-.158 (.188)
Urbanization rate	.044* (.023)	.029 (.021)	.041* (.021)	.035 (.025)	.003 (.023)
Theil Index	-.806 (.915)	-.018 (.787)	-.118 (.788)	-.440 (.935)	.906 (.865)
Illiteracy rate	-.022 (.030)	-.006 (.025)	.004 (.026)	-.032 (.029)	-.027 (.026)
Percent of ethnic	-.001 (.008)	-.004 (.007)	.001 (.007)	-.005 (.008)	-.001 (.008)
A × B	.108 (.099)	.120 (.076)	.145 (.089)	.093 (.088)	.022 (.053)
Intercept	-.897 (.964)	-.086 (.824)	-.973 (.833)	-.306 (.977)	.774 (.892)
Province Intercept	.114** (.039)	.083** (.028)	.083** (.028)	.122** (.042)	.106** (.035)
ICC	3.35%	2.47%	2.46%	3.58%	3.13%

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported; \*  $p < .05$ (one-tailed test), \*\*  $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

### *Supplemental Analysis*

Although we failed to find the religiousness of provincial context benefits individuals affiliated with instituted religion by enhancing the deterrent effect of their religiosity on deviance (i.e., not significant cross-level interactions), our results showed that an individual's odds of violating the law and rules was inversely related not only with individual but also contextual religiosity in the total sample (see Table 3.2). So, we conducted a supplemental analysis to see whether provincial religiosity had a deterrent effect on deviance among non-religious residents in province, estimating the multilevel models of Table 3.3 for the subsample of religious nones.

Table 3.5 presents the supplemental results that show inverse relationships between provincial religiosity and the odds of violating the law ( $-.267$ ), workplace rule ( $-.200$ ), government rule ( $-.264$ ), and organizational rules ( $-.211$ ). However, it was not significantly related to transportation rule violation ( $-.093$ ,  $p > .05$ ), perhaps because in China violating transportation rules is less likely to be considered as deviant or immoral than other violations and thus less likely to be affected by the religiousness of province. Specifically, controlling for other individual-level and province-level variables, we found an increase of one religious site per 10,000 people in a province decreased the odds of violating the law, workplace rules, government rules, and organizational rules by 23.5, 18.1, 23.2, and 19.0 percent, respectively. This finding indicates that a province's religious context tended to deter individuals living in the province from engaging in law- and rule-violating behaviors even if they were not affiliated with instituted religion. In other words, we found that the protective effect of religion was likely to spill over into

the broader society beyond the religious community by influencing the normative atmosphere of province.

### *Discussion and Conclusion*

This study examined the effect of religiosity, measured at both individual and contextual level, on an individual's deviant behaviors in China, where religion is regulated and marginalized (Grim and Finke 2006, 2007, Yang 2006, 2011). By doing so, we tested the moral community thesis in a non-Western context, which has rarely been done since it was proposed by Stark (Adamczyk 2008; Regnerus 2003; Stark 1996; Wallace et al. 2007; Welch et al. 1991). Previous tests conducted in the U.S. context tend to show inconsistent results regarding whether contextual religiosity is inversely related to individual deviance and enhances the inverse relationship between individual religiosity and deviance.

The present study provides partial support for the moral community thesis as we found that contextual religiosity was inversely associated with an individual's violation of the law and various rules, whether the individual is affiliated with instituted religion or not. Thus our results support Stark's argument that religiosity is not only an individual trait but also a group or communal property that influences an individual's behaviors (Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982). We, however, failed to find significant cross-level interactions: that is, provincial religiosity did not increase the strength of inverse relationship between individual religiosity and deviance, unlike what we hypothesized. Thus, our study provided no supportive evidence of Stark's proposition that the effect of individual religiosity on deviance should be larger or more likely to be observed in a more religious than less or non-religious context (Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982). In China,

religiosity at both individual and contextual level seems to protect an individual from engaging in violations of the law and rules independently rather than interactively with each other.

This finding highlights an important role of religion in China in two ways. It suggests that instituted religions in China tend to protect individuals from violating the law and other conventional rules. Scholars have speculated that religion has no significant relationship with deviance or conformity because Confucianism emphasizes social conformity as much as religion does (Zhang and Thomas 1994) and religion in China doesn't have an all-powerful God sanctioning the moral behaviors of individuals (Shahar and Weller 1996; Stark 2001). In this study we separated instituted religion from folk religion because the former, unlike the latter, was expected to have deterrent effect on deviant behaviors because it has a systematic orthodoxy and a many powerful god(s) that proscribe immoral behaviors including crime and deviance. As we anticipated, people who were affiliated with instituted religion were likely to report lower odds of violating the law and other rules than those who were not. In sum, we found instituted religions in China to have a protective effect on deviance, similar to Christianity in Western contexts (Baier and Wright 2001; Johnson et al. 2001; Johnson and Jang 2011).

Table 3.5

*Religion as Individual and Contextual Control for Religious Nones*  
(Individual N=7, 364, Province N=25)

Variables	(1) Violating the law	(2) Violating workplace rule	(3) Violating government rule	(4) Violating organizational rule	(5) Violating transportation rule
Ethnic minority	.499** (.111)	.498** (.112)	.454** (.110)	.494** (.113)	.444** (.110)
Urban resident	-.207** (.0654)	-.222** (.0625)	-.145** (.0626)	-.226** (.0640)	-.176** (.0612)
Age	-.00815** (.00207)	-.00896** (.00199)	-.0107** (.00198)	-.00809** (.00202)	-.00806** (.00193)
Female	-.0870 (.0553)	-.0168 (.0529)	-.0532 (.0529)	-.124** (.0542)	-.0757 (.0517)
Education	-.0806** (.0284)	-.0957** (.0271)	-.0342 (.0270)	-.0601** (.0278)	-.0876** (.0263)
Married	.0107 (.0700)	-.0563 (.0669)	-.0479 (.0667)	-.0201 (.0685)	-.0598 (.0653)
Unemployment	-.234** (.116)	.00998 (.108)	.0889 (.107)	-.0461 (.110)	-.00484 (.106)
Income (logged)	-.0279** (.00870)	-.0406** (.00852)	-.0329** (.00838)	-.0262** (.00858)	-.0316** (.00827)
Communist party	-.255** (.0918)	-.282** (.0861)	-.360** (.0872)	-.420** (.0902)	-.252** (.0831)
Religious sites per 10K people	-.267** (.113)	-.200** (.0801)	-.264** (.0930)	-.211** (.0994)	-.0931 (.0624)
Total population	-4.824 (6.470)	-4.692 (5.416)	-3.520 (5.595)	-2.374 (6.691)	-5.547 (6.156)
Percent of communist	4.156* (2.416)	5.047** (1.963)	4.970** (2.052)	3.946 (2.464)	3.802* (2.167)
GDP per capita (10,000 RMB)	-.371* (.207)	-.330* (.175)	-.314* (.180)	-.379* (.215)	-.161 (.200)
Urbanization rate	.0424 (.0266)	.0311 (.0221)	.0371 (.0229)	.0347 (.0275)	.00385 (.0253)
Theil Index	-.770 (.962)	.0202 (.800)	.143 (.826)	-.392 (.995)	1.013 (.916)
Illiteracy rate	-.0184 (.0340)	-.000729 (.0268)	.000906 (.0287)	-.0285 (.0334)	-.0291 (.0284)
Percent of ethnic minority	-.00186 (.00821)	-.00402 (.00687)	.000998 (.00708)	-.00590 (.00849)	-.00178 (.00783)
Intercept	-.908 (1.050)	-.229 (.862)	-.889 (.899)	-.377 (1.072)	.764 (.966)
Province intercept	.118** (.0422)	.0802** (.0285)	.0854** (.0301)	.131** (.0464)	.115** (.0383)
ICC	3.45%	2.38%	2.53%	3.38%	3.37%

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are reported; \*  $p < .05$ (one-tailed test), \*\*  $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

In addition, in China instituted religion seems to have a spillover effect in that it was found to protect non-religious as well as religious people from committing deviance. The variation in religiosity observed across provinces is inconsistent with a view that China is a homogeneously secular country (Grim and Finke 2007; Stark 2001). According to our supplemental analysis, religiosity at the contextual level was inversely related to an individual's violation of the law, workplace rule, government rule, and organizational rule. That is, controlling for individual and contextual characteristics, religious nones living in more religious provinces were less likely to commit deviance than those in less religious provinces. Perhaps in a vibrant religious environment, conventional religious orthodoxy would build into the local social network and social norms to regulate not only religious individuals but also religious nones from law and rule violations.

The present findings also suggest new research questions for future research. First, while we could not examine the effect of religious concentration or religious diversity in this study, previous researchers have argued that it is homogeneous religion rather than overall religiosity that protects individuals from deviance (Ellison, Burr, and McCall 1997; Regnerus 2003; Trawick and Howsen 2006). Because we treated instituted religions of similar institutions and orthodoxies as belonging to a same group, this study could not examine whether the domination of a homogenous religion or the diversity of religions at provincial level was associated with individual deviance. Future research should examine whether the concentration of a particular religion in a local setting has an effect on individual deviance.

Second, we could not examine the individual and contextual effect of folk religions because no information about religious sites for folk religion was available in our data. Thus, the context-level effect of folk religion on deviance remains unknown, while a previous study shows that folk religions can provide public goods and shaping local democracy for local community (Tsai 2007). Further research needs to measure the regional, provincial, and communal level of folk religiosity to examine the effect of context-level folk religiosity by taking two approaches to data collection. Specifically, the percentage of people who identify themselves with folk religion can be calculated for each province based on survey data. It should be kept in mind, however, that the percentage may be underestimated since many followers of folk religions do not necessarily report that they are affiliated with particular folk religions despite practicing them (Palmer and Wickeri 2011). Alternatively, religious sites of folk religions, such as ancestor halls and temples of various deities, can be used as an indicator of the context-level folk religiosity.

Third, further studies are needed to incorporate the thriving underground churches into the study of aggregate-level religiosity. Because the Spatial Explorer of Religion data includes only officially registered religious sites, the number of total religious sites is surely an underestimate given that unregistered house churches and small scale congregations are thriving both in urban and rural China (Bao et al. 2014; Wenger 2004; Yang 2005; F. Yang 2010; Yu 2010). Cults with strong organization, such as the Eastern Lightning and Falungong, that are forbidden by the government should also be taken into account (Chan 2004; Dunn 2008). However, they should be differentiated from the officially registered regions since the forbidden religions are likely to deviate from the

social norms, thus increasing rather than decreasing the probability of individual deviance (Stark and Bainbridge 1980).

Additionally, future research on religion in China should examine the religion-deviance relationship using other common but culture-appropriate measures of both constructs. That is, researchers should test the moral community thesis using ascetic (e.g., substance use) as well as non-ascetic deviance (e.g., law violation). They should also consider types of deviance particularly recognized by the Chinese society (e.g., extramarital sexuality and lack of filial piety). Common measures of religiosity, such as religious salience and practices, should be examined as well. However, church attendance may not be a very good indicator of religiosity because Eastern religions (e.g., Zen Buddhism and Taoism) encourage private rather than public practices of religion, unlike Abrahamic religions that emphasize frequent attendance of communal religious activities. In addition, religious attendance is suppressed as government regulation increases the risk and cost for public attendance (Hu 2013; Yang 2006).

Finally, further research is also needed to examine the effect of religiosity at the level of smaller context than province, such as community, county, and village. While we found province-level religiosity to affect individual deviant behaviors, within-province variations in religiosity are worth studying given that not only religiosity but also economic development and historical characteristics related to religion would vary across counties and villages of province (Cai, Wang, and Du 2002; Palmer and Wickeri 2011; Tsai 2007).

In conclusion, despite limitations acknowledged above, our study partially supports the moral community thesis by finding that not only individual religious

affiliation but also the contextual religiosity are inversely related to individual deviance. Although we failed to find that contextual religiosity increased the inverse relationship between individual religiosity and deviance, the protective effect of contextual religiosity was found to benefit Chinese society beyond religious community, protecting non-religious as well as religious people from violating the law and conventional rules.

Table 3.6

*Descriptive Statistics*  
(Individual variables N=8224; rovincial variables N=25)

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Range
<b>Individual Level</b>			
Law violation “Have you ever violated the law?” (1=yes;0=no)	.318	.466	0 – 1
Government rule violation “Have you ever violated government rules?” (1=yes;0=no)	.377	.485	0 – 1
Working rule violation “Have you ever violated working rules?” (1=yes;0=no)	.411	.492	0 – 1
Organization rule violation “Have you ever violated organization rules?” (1=yes;0=no)	.357	.479	0 – 1
Transportation rule violation “Have you ever violated transportation rules?” (1=yes;0=no)	.431	.495	0 – 1
Affiliating with instituted religion (1=affiliating with Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity or Islam; 0=no religious affiliation)	.109	.312	0 – 1
Ethnicity (1=non-Han ethnicity; 0=Han ethnicity)	.090	.286	0 – 1
Residence (1=urban residence;0=rural residence)	.431	.495	0 – 1
Age (at the year of survey)	48.838	15.497	19 – 98
Female (1=female;0=male)	.519	.500	0 – 1
Education (0=no education; 1=elementary school; 2=middle school; 3=high school; 4=adult high education; 5=college education and above )	1.971	1.338	0 – 5
Married (1=yes; 0=no)	.810	.393	0 – 1
Unemployment (1=yes; 0=no)	.060	.238	0 – 1
Annual personal income (logged)	8.037	3.184	0 – 14.845
Communist party member (1=yes; 0=no)	.114	.318	0 – 1
<b>Contextual Level</b>			
Number of religious institutions per 10,000 people	.575	1.321	.036 – 11.039
Total Population (10,000 people)	.032	.020	.001 – 075
Percent of communist party members	.114	.034	.070 – .253
GDP per capita (10,000 RMB $\approx$ US\$1,500)	2.564	1.015	1.030 – 4.460
Urbanization rate	46.873	8.687	29.890 – 63.400
Theil index	.156	.098	.063 – .489
Illiteracy rate	7.201	3.276	3.200 – 15.940
Percent of minor ethnicity	8.672	12.858	.310 – 59.430

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Religious Tolerance, an Educational Effect

#### *Introduction*

Many studies have suggested that religious minorities in China are severely regulated and persecuted by the official state (Chan 2004; Kolodner 1994; Liu 1996; Mosher 2014; Potter 2003; Yang 2006, 2011). The Pew Research Center ranks China second in the world for having the most restrictive religious policies in 2012 (Pew Research Center 2015). According to the Government Regulation Index (GRI) produced by Finke and Grim (2006), Chinese government scores 9.2 out of 10 on a scale of religious intolerance. As noted by Grim and Finke (2007: 634) in their religious persecution study, “practitioners of Falun Gong and other religious figures are routinely jailed in China,” which indicates a hostile and coercive environment for all religious believers in China.

Still, there is little research concerning Chinese Citizens’ attitudes towards religion and believers in religion. Interestingly, while the Pew Research Center identifies the Chinese government as openly anti-religious, it also finds little non-government hostility toward religion. Likewise, Grim and Finke give China a 4.8 out of 10 rating on their Social Regulation Index (SRI), an indicator of high social intolerance towards religion. These studies suggest that Chinese citizens may not be as intolerant of religion as their government. In this study, I seek to better understand the determinants of social tolerance towards religion in China and specifically probe the role that education has in

this dynamic. Do atheistic schools promote a hatred of religion and religious believers allying with the anti-religious government? Or does education liberate individuals thus promoting more tolerance of minorities and outgroup members?

Theoretically, there are two competing perspectives regarding the effect of education on tolerance. The “education as liberation” perspective considers education a key factor in liberating individuals from the dominate ideology, enabling people to tolerate differences in others in both private and public spheres (Bobo and Licari 1989; Coenders and Scheepers 2003; Côté and Erickson 2009; Hadler 2012; Kozloski 2010; Moore and Ovadia 2006; Sullivan et al. 1994). Accordingly, education has been associated with more tolerance of homosexuality (Katharine 2006; Kozloski 2010; Ohlander, Batalova, and Treas 2005; Stevenson 1988; Treas 2002), racial differences (Branton and Jones 2005; Jackman 1978; Smith 1981; Weldon 2006), egalitarian gender arrangement (Werfhorst and Graaf 2004), immigration (Davidov and Meuleman 2012; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007), unconventional sex (Treas 2002), homelessness (Phelan et al. 1995a; Tompsett et al. 2006) and religious others (Dynes 1967; Golebiowska 2004; Grim and Wike 2010; Hackett 1999; Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2008; Ramirez 2006; Sullivan et al. 1994; Twenge, Carter, and Campbell 2015; Twenge et al. 2015).

Instead of liberating individuals from the dominate ideology, the “education as socialization” perspective, however, argues that education socializes individuals into the mainstreamed culture and legitimates for the status quos (Jackman 1978, 1981; Jackman and Muha 1984; Lancee and Sarrasin 2015). Therefore, education would be less tolerant with outgroup members especially when those people proposed a threat to their social identity and status quo (Janus 2010; Lancee and Sarrasin 2015; Phelan et al. 1995a).

Deriving from these two competing perspectives, this study examines the relationship between education and religious tolerance in a largely irreligious context: China.

Currently, religious expression is marginalized by mainstream Chinese culture and is also regulated by the Chinese government (Yu 2005). This study ponders the extent to which education in China (1) increases tolerance of religious minorities in public and private life, or (2) increases allegiance with the official policy of China, one that is decidedly anti-religious. Data from the 2010 Wave of China General Social Survey provides multiple items which address religious tolerance. The findings suggest that education increases tolerance of religion in private life as Chinese citizens who are more highly educated are more likely to approve of and accept personalized religiosity. However, people with higher education are less tolerant of religion in public, especially in regard to the political influence of religion. In these cases, the highly educated defend the secularity of Chinese institutions and support the limiting of religious political power. This chapter clarifies the complex relationship between education and religious tolerance in China by demonstrating that education generates inter-personal tolerance while fostering support of the dominant political ideology.

The rest of the study is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a theoretical review on education and social tolerance and Section 3 elaborates education and religion in contemporary China. Section 4 presents the data and method. Findings are provided in Section 5 followed by a discussion and conclusion remark.

### *Theoretical Backgrounds*

Among so many studies examining the relationship between education and social tolerance, there are two competing perspectives providing the explanations: perspective

on “education as liberation” and perspective on “education as socialization.” This study will test both perspectives and apply them to explain religious tolerance in China.

### *Education as Liberation?*

The “education as liberation” perspective argues that education can increase tolerance for diversity and the marginal by providing individuals with higher cognitive capability, pluralist social networks, and democracy norms. According to many studies, attending school can promote greater cognitive sophistication and more complex reasoning that enables more educated individuals to better evaluate new ideas, which increases tolerance of differences (Bobo and Licari 1989; Gaasholt and Togeby 1995; Ohlander et al. 2005; Sullivan et al. 1994). While education teaches specific knowledge, it also cultivates new ways of interpreting information, reasoning, thinking, shaping motivation and establishing capability for life-long learning (Jackman and Muha 1984; Nunn 1978; Ohlander et al. 2005). Higher education in particular fosters complex reasoning, creativity, and rationality (Barone and Werfhorst 2011; Bobo and Licari 1989; Gaasholt and Togeby 1995; Ohlander et al. 2005). With more flexible and rational strategies of thinking, people who are more educated develop a better awareness of human diversity and understanding of lifestyles “involving deviations from their own everyday life” (Nunn 1978; Stubager 2008:332).

Moreover, education tends to expose people to more pluralistic social networks, thereby promoting greater understanding of and respect for outgroups (Doktór 2002; Dynes 1967; Hackett 1999; Ramirez 2006; Schlueter and Scheepers 2010; Sullivan et al. 1994). More educated individuals are able to establish more pluralistic social networks through college campus activities (Hackett 1999; Liebkind and McAlister 1999),

consumption of diverse media (especially internet use) (Kobayashi 2010; Roblyer et al. 2010), and greater geographic mobility (Faggian and McCann 2009; Faggian, McCann, and Sheppard 2007; Haapanen and Tervo 2012). Diverse social networks reduce uncertainty regarding the outgroups (Borgida, Federico, and Sullivan 2009), undermine common stereotypes, and develop more secure feelings about outgroups (Burns and Gimpel 2000; Canetti-Nisim, Ariely, and Halperin 2007; Hjerm and Nagayoshi 2011; Raijman, Semyonov, and Schmidt 2003; Savelkoul et al. 2010). All of these factors thus promote tolerance for others who are different (Clark-Ibáñez and Felmlee 2004; Crisp and Turner 2009; Frølund Thomsen 2012).

Education is also thought to promote the core values of civil society, such as general trust and an interest in bridging social capital (Berggren and Nilsson 2014; Borgonovi 2012; Persell, Green, and Gurevich 2001). These liberal and democratic ideals make individuals more tolerant of deviant or nontraditional people (Heerwig and McCabe 2009; Ohlander et al. 2005; Phelan et al. 1995b; Weil 1985). In turn, education can challenge existing authority, liberate individuals from conventional institutions and ideologies (Golebiowska 2004), reduce the perceived threat of outgroups, and foster greater social integration (Lipset 1959; McClosky and Brill 1983; Stubager 2008).

In line with these findings, education in China can also foster religious tolerance as education in China has been shown to improve students' complex reasoning (Freudenthal 2006; Greenfield and Cocking 2014; Jin and Cortazzi 2006; Liu and Wu 2006). It also helps develop diverse social networks over the life course of individuals (R. Yang 2010; Yang and Welch 2010). And Chinese colleges increase exposure to religious knowledge, religious scholars, religious institutions, and religious activities (Gu 2008; Ji 2006, 2011;

Nanbu 2008; Yang 2004, 2005). According to the “education as liberation” perspective, I therefore hypothesize that:

*H1. Education in China is positively associated with religious tolerance.*

#### *Education as Socialization?*

The “education as socialization” perspective, however, argues that education socializes individuals into the mainstream ideology and legitimates status. Therefore, more highly educated people are less likely to tolerate differences in others, especially when the outgroups pose potential threats to their status and the mainstream ideology (Jackman 1978, 1981; Jackman and Muha 1984; Lancee and Sarrasin 2015).

Gramsci first proposed that traditional intellectuals, cultivated through formal education, play a central role of shaping the cultural hegemony of ruling elites (Gramsci 1995). In this way, education serves as a tool of cultural indoctrination, reinforcing class structures, social controls and obedience to authorities (Bourdieu 1977; Friedman et al. 2011). Consequently, education is a process of legitimizing the dominate ideology rather than questioning authority (Schaefer 1996; Stubager 2009). In this sense, education imparts an ideology that supports dominant-group interests and provides the cognitive sophistication needed to defend those interests. Therefore, more highly educated people are more likely to express tolerance only when the tolerance does not disturb their status quo. Instead, when their status quo is threatened, more highly educated people will be more hostile towards those that are different (Jackman and Muha 1984; Janus 2010; Phelan et al. 1995b).

Similar to these studies, some scholars point out that a perceived threat, a core determinate of social hostility, is grounded not over material resources, but also, and

more importantly, over symbolic meanings (McLaren and Johnson 2007). That is, competition for social identity, ethnic identity, national identity and status quo are also sources of perceived threats (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006; Raijman et al. 2003). For this reason, people with more education may not be more tolerant of outgroups that present a symbolic threat to their identity. For instance, education increases the risk of ethnic violence among European nations as education enhances collective identity (Lange and Dawson 2010). Bauman and Leech (2012) also found no evidence that education can reduce anti-Christian violence in India.

Allied with these studies, education in China can also reduce religious tolerance as education serves as a major socialization instrument for anti-religious ideologies. As stated by the National Congress of the CCP in 1979, “the religious question can never been solved by means of a few political movements or administrative decrees. We can rely only on persuasion and education to deal with ideological issues, nor mandatory decrees, only the democratic methods, nor force or dictatorship” (MacInnis 1989:30). Public education is a vital tool for the communist government to promote anti-religious ideology.

First, in China, religion is strictly separated from education as the law clearly forbids activities that use religion to interfere with educational activities. This applies to ethnic minorities as well (Chen 2016; Nanbu 2008). Second, atheistic education is embedded in all levels of education while religion is treated ambiguously and negatively. As Ji (2006) pointed out, “[I]n the official school textbooks [in China], we can scarcely find any trace of the Confucian, the Taoist, and the Buddhist classics that constitute the

main foundation of traditional Chinese culture. What the young learn at school are only some arbitrary negative judgments about religion.”

Meanwhile, anti-religious education is also embedded in the curriculum and becomes more intense as students age. In the syllabi of primary and secondary schools, political education and moral education (*Sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu/Sixiang Pinde Jiaoyu*), which has a Marxist theoretical foundation, “stems from traditions of first equating politics with morality, phrasing them both in the same language and then of encouraging correct moral and political relations and behaviors through education” (Li Ping et al. 2004:450–51). University education is also embedded within atheistic ideological structures. After entering a Chinese college, students must take five required courses on political education: Principles of Marxist Philosophy, Principles of Marxist Politics and Economics, An Introduction to Mao Zedong’s Thought, An Introduction to Deng Xiaoping’s Theory, and Contemporary World Economics and Politics (Li Ping et al. 2004). Moreover, many universities set up Marxist education institutes to develop Marxist theories in education, including atheistic education.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, scholars in these institutions have been paying attention to students’ faith and have directed research efforts to understanding the “problems” associated with increased religious affiliation on campuses, as well as potential “solutions” to and “coping mechanisms” for this issue (Gong, He, and Li 2012; Li 2004; Wang and Uecker 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of these institutes are described in lectures delivered by government leaders in China, especially Zhou (2004) and Hu (2006).

According to the “education as socialization” perspective, education in China can socialize individuals into the dominant anti-religious ideology, and thus cause a decline in religious tolerance. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

*H2. Education is negatively associated with religious tolerance in China.*

### *Data and Method*

#### *Data*

Data used in this study comes from the 2010 Wave of China General Social Survey (CGSS2010). CGSS2010 resembles the General Social Survey in the United States. A four-stage clustered sampling design with unequal probability, and 2801 county-level administrative units constituted the initial sampling frame. The second stage of sampling randomly selected sub-district administrative units from each primary sampling unit, and the third stage selected neighborhood or village level administrative units from each sub-district administrative unit. The final stage randomly selected one respondent from each selected household. Overall the sample size was 11,770. One third of the samples born in January, April, June and September were chosen to answer additional questions on religiosity and religious tolerance. This study only includes valid samples answering the religious tolerance questions (N=3112, 26.4% of overall samples).

#### *Measures*

*Dependent Variables.* Four dependent variables are investigated in this study: religious respect, religious tolerance in private life, religious tolerance in public life, and religious tolerance of political influence. The former two indicators measure religious tolerance on both general and private levels, both of which involve minimal power

struggles. Meanwhile tolerating religion in public and political life demands a recognition of the symbolic power of religion in the society (Lukes 2005).

*Religious respect*, is measured by two items asking respondents how much they agree that “all religion should enjoy equal rights in China” and “we should respect all religions.” The answers are on a 5-point Likert scale (1= absolutely agree; 2=agree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=disagree; 5=absolutely disagree). Maximum-likelihood exploratory factor analysis and internal reliability analysis show that these two items are loaded on a common factor with high loadings (.68) and a high reliability ( $\alpha = .73$ ). A composite index ranging between 0 to 1 was constructed by adding the two items together and then divided by 10. A higher scoring value thus represents more respect for religions in general in China.

*Private religious tolerance* is a composition based on two measures asking respondents how acceptable it is to “marry your relatives” or “vote for” people from the other religions (1=very acceptable; 2=somewhat acceptable; 3=somewhat unacceptable; 4=very unacceptable). Maximum-likelihood exploratory factor analysis and internal reliability analysis show that these two items are loaded on a common factor with high loadings (.69) and a high reliability ( $\alpha = .81$ ). The answers are reversely coded, added together and then divided by 8; thus, a higher score shows religion being more acceptable in their private lives.

*Religious tolerance in public* is measured by two questions asking how much the respondents believe that conservative religious members can express their ideas in public by “hosting conferences” or “publishing books” (1=should be totally allowed, 2=might be

allowed; 3=might be forbidden; 4=should be totally forbidden). Maximum-likelihood exploratory factor analysis and internal reliability analysis show that these two items are loaded on a common factor with high loadings (.64) and very high reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ). I reversed coded the answers, added them together and then divided them by 8; thus, a higher score shows more tolerance toward extreme religious behaviors in public.

*Religious tolerance of political influence* is asked by two questions “religious leaders shouldn’t impact on people’s voting decision” and “religious leaders shouldn’t impact on government’s decision” using a 5-Likert scale (1=absolutely agree; 2=agree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=disagree; 5=somewhat disagree). Maximum-likelihood exploratory factor analysis and internal reliability analysis show that these two items are loaded on a common factor with high loadings (.78) and very high reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ). The answers are also added together, reversely coded and then divided by 10.

*Independent Variables.* In this study, education attainment is the key independent variable. According to the respondents’ answers to the categorical question of the highest education level, I generated three dummy variables on education attainment. Low education includes those who had no education at all or only primary education. A middle level of education includes respondents reported at least participating in middle school or high school. Education with vocational high school is also considered as the middle level of education. High education includes general college education, adult high education and postgraduate education. Respondents with low education are treated as the referenced category. By expressing education as a set of dummy categories (low education, middle level of education and high education) rather than as a simple continuous variable, I am able to observe any nonlinearity in the education effects.

Controlled variables, which are thought to be associated with both educational attainment and tolerant attitudes include age, gender (1=female), ethnicity (1=Han), family income (in log form), urban-rural residence (1=urban resident), political identity (1=CCP member) and marital status (1=married) (Golebiowska 1995, 2004; Gustafsson and Sai 2009; Hannum 2002; Inglehart 1990, 1997; Inglehart and Flanagan 1987; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). In addition, religious identity is controlled for the potential link both education attainment and religious tolerance (Edgell et al. 2006; Ellison and George 1994; Grim and Wike 2010; Habermas 2004; Licata, Sanchez-Mazas, and Green 2011). Based on the self-reported religious affiliation, five religious dummy variables are created—Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, folk religions and religious nones (=referenced group). By adding control of religious affiliation, I am particularly interested in understanding whether religiosity suppresses or mediates the educational effect on religious tolerance.

### *Analytical Strategy*

Multivariate OLS models are used to predict the education effect on religious tolerance. Model (1), (3), (5) and (7) reported baseline regression results for individual religious tolerance, respect of religion, tolerance of religious expression in public and political tolerance of religion respectively. The baseline models include education attainment and basic social-demographic control. Based on the baseline models, Model (2), (4), (6) and (8) add control of religious identity to examine the effect of religious affiliation on religious tolerance and to see how the relationship between education and religious tolerance is changed by religious affiliation. To minimize the potential bias and

take full advantage of the information available, multiple imputations (N=10) are used for each regression (Allison 2001).

Table 4.1

*Descriptive Variables (N=3112)*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
<i>General tolerance of religion</i>			
Religious respect	0.705	0.193	0.2-1
Religious tolerance at private life	0.679	0.232	0.25-1
<i>Public and Political tolerance of religion</i>			
Religious tolerance in public life	0.429	0.212	0.25-1
Tolerating political influence of religion	0.403	0.185	0.2-1
<i>Independent Variable</i>			
<i>Education</i>			
College education and above	0.164	0.370	0-1
Middle level of education	0.494	0.500	0-1
Primary education and below (reference group)	0.342	0.474	0-1
<i>Sociodemographic control</i>			
age	48.362	15.578	19-96
Major ethnicity: Han (referenced to minority others)	0.907	0.291	0-1
Female (referenced to male)	0.507	0.500	0-1
Married (referenced to other marital status)	0.805	0.396	0-1
Urban resident (referenced to rural resident)	0.497	0.500	0-1
Log (income)	8.279	3.126	0-14.51
Communist party membership	0.124	0.329	0-1
<i>Religious identity</i>			
Islam	0.029	0.168	0-1
Buddhism	0.064	0.244	0-1
Folk religion	0.025	0.155	0-1
Christianity	0.024	0.154	0-1
Religious nones (reference group)	0.857	0.351	0-1

Note: Standard Error in parentheses; \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

## *Findings*

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics of variables included in analysis are summarized in Table 4.1. The majority of the respondents have a middle level of education attainment (49.4%). Only 16.4% of the respondents have only a primary level of education or no education. 34.2% of the respondents have entered college or above. The average age is 48.4, with 90.7% ethnicity Han, 49.7% urban residents, 50.7% female, 80.5% married and 12.4% CCP member. The average income annually for each person is about ¥ 3904.9 (≈\$582.8). Most of the respondents identified themselves as religious nones (85.6%), with only 2.9%, 6.4%, 2.5% and 2.4% affiliating with Islam, Buddhism, Folk religions and Christianity.

Overall, Chinese people have a high tolerance of religion in general and in their private lives while they report a low tolerance of religion in public and the political sphere. Figure 1 displays the percentage of respondents that reported to somewhat agree or very much agree to tolerate religion in specific options. The general tolerance of religion is high as 77.5%, and 80.6% respondents agree that religion should be respected equally, as well as equal rights. The private tolerance of religion declines a little bit yet still presents at a high level. About 67.1% and 61.5% respondents can tolerate people from other religions in terms of marrying their relatives or becoming their voting candidates.

In contrast, tolerating religious behaviors in public and in political life are low in China. Only 22.2% and 23% respondents believe that extreme religious people can

express their view in a conference or through publication. Similar to many secular states, religion influencing politics is least tolerated in China with less than 10% of people agreeing that religious leaders should influence political voting and government policies (Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox 1974).

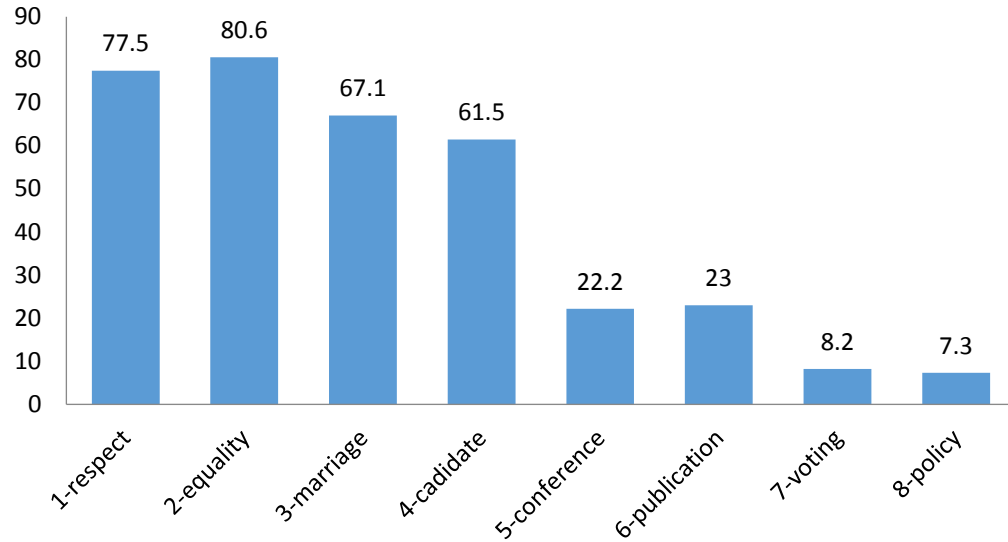


Figure 4.1. Percent of Respondents Agreeing with Particular Religious Issues <sup>2</sup>

### *Religious Tolerance in Private Life*

Model (1) and (2) in Table 4.2 displays the OLS regression results of educational effect on individual tolerance of religion. Being consistent with Hypothesis 1, education increases general tolerance of religion. Compared with low educated people, people with

<sup>2</sup> The specific notions for Figure 2 are as followed. 1-respect: We should respect all religions in China; 2-equality: all religious organizations should enjoy equal right in China; 3-marriage. I agree that people from the other religions can marry with my relative; 4-candidate: I agree that people from the other religions can be my voting candidates; 5-conference: conservative religious members can host conference in public to express their idea; 6-publication: conservative religious members can publish their idea in public; 7-voting: religious leaders can influence people's voting decision; 8-policy: religious leaders shouldn't influence government policy.

middle level of education and highest level of education reported 0.037 ( $p<0.001$ ) and 0.068 ( $p<0.000$ ) points higher in accepting people from other religions to marry their relatives or become their voting candidate. This suggests that people with higher level of education are more open to diverse kinship network and care less about the voting candidates' religious background.

This positive educational effect on religious tolerance in private life strengthens after self-reported religious affiliation is controlled in Model (2). After controlling religious affiliation and basic sociodemographic variables, respondents with middle-level and high education score 0.038 ( $p<0.001$ ) and 0.072 ( $p<0.001$ ) higher in tolerating religion in private life, which is slightly higher than the coefficients reported in Model 1 (0.037 and 0.068 respectively). This suggests that the positive relationship between educational attainment and religious tolerance is suppressed by religious affiliation. That is, increased education in China may decrease the probability of religious affiliation and thus reduce the individual tolerance of religion.

Besides educational attainment, urban residence reported a more tolerant attitude towards religion in private compared with rural residents (0.031,  $p<0.001$ ). Age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, income and communist party members have no significant effects on tolerating religion in private. The insignificant relationship between income and religious respect rejects the "post-materialism thesis" that people become more tolerant to outgroups when they are more secure in materials (Inglehart 1997; Inglehart and Flanagan 1987; Persell et al. 2001).

Table 4.2

*OLS Regression Results of Education on Religious Tolerance*

Variables	Individual tolerance		General respect		Public tolerance		Political tolerance	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	<i>b</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>beta</i>
High education	0.068	0.072***	0.030	0.041**	0.003	0.005	-0.033	-0.036**
	0.017	0.017	0.014	0.014	0.015	0.015	0.013	0.013
Middle level education	0.037	0.038***	0.006	0.012	-0.002	-0.002	-0.018	-0.019*
	0.011	0.011	0.009	0.009	0.010	0.010	0.008	0.008
Age	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.001**	-0.001	-0.001**	0.000	0.000
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Ethnicity: Han	-0.005	-0.028	-0.059	-0.016	0.011	-0.007	0.005	-0.022
	0.014	0.017	0.012	0.014	0.013	0.016	0.011	0.013
Female	0.001	-0.003	-0.008	-0.014*	0.006	0.001	0.006	0.006
	0.009	0.009	0.007	0.007	0.008	0.008	0.007	0.007
Married	-0.011	-0.009	-0.002	0.000	-0.045	-0.044***	-0.005	-0.005
	0.011	0.011	0.009	0.009	0.010	0.010	0.008	0.008
Log (income)	0.002	0.002	-0.001	-0.001	0.001	0.001	-0.001	-0.001
	0.002	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Urban resident	0.031	0.031**	0.032	0.026**	0.020	0.020*	-0.011	-0.008
	0.010	0.010	0.008	0.008	0.009	0.009	0.007	0.007
CCP member	-0.012	-0.011	-0.019	-0.017	-0.025	-0.023	-0.029	-0.029**
	0.014	0.014	0.011	0.011	0.012	0.012	0.010	0.010
Islam		-0.064*		0.130***		-0.044		-0.084***
		0.028		0.023		0.026		0.022
Buddhism		0.094***		0.087***		0.059***		0.001
		0.017		0.014		0.016		0.013
folk		0.070*		0.047*		-0.002		0.014
		0.028		0.022		0.025		0.010
Christian		0.103***		0.095***		0.107***		0.014
		0.027		0.022		0.024		0.021
_cons	0.638	0.658***	0.715	0.665***	0.472	0.489***	0.421	0.446***
	0.027	0.029	0.021	0.023	0.024	0.026	0.020	0.021

Source: 2010 Wave of China General Social Survey; Standard Error in parentheses, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

Religious affiliations can significantly affect religious tolerance in private life, yet not in a consistent direction. Buddhism, Christianity and folk religions are more likely than atheists to tolerate marriage across different religions and voting for candidates from different religious backgrounds. Meanwhile, Muslim are less likely to tolerate interreligious marriage and voting for religious others. This finding may be slightly different from evidence based on Western society. As many studies have showed that religious affiliations, especially with conservative religious backgrounds are less likely to develop private tolerance toward religious others (Aarøe 2011; Clarke, Powell, and Savulescu 2013; Grim and Wike 2010; Karpov 2002).

#### *Religious Tolerance in General*

Model (3) and (4) reported the OLS regression results of educational effect on general religious tolerance. Hypothesis 1 is once again confirmed as educational attainment has a significant positive effect on tolerating religion in general. Compared to their counterparts with the lowest level of education, college educated people reported 0.03 ( $p < 0.05$ ) points higher in respecting all religions in general and treating different religions equally. However, respondents with middle-level education are not significantly different from less educated people in respecting all religion and treating religion equally. This suggests that college education may have a unique effect in promoting religious tolerance in general. Again, after controlling for religious affiliation, the positive educational effect on religious tolerance in general increases from 0.03 to 0.041 ( $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that the positive educational effect is suppressed by religious affiliation. In particular, education may decrease religious tolerance in general by reducing the likelihood of religious affiliation.

According to Model (4), older people and urban residents are more tolerant of religions in general. On average, one additional year increase in age predicts 0.001 ( $p < 0.001$ ) points higher in respecting religion in general and treating different religions equally. Compared to rural residents, urban citizens predict 0.026 ( $p < 0.01$ ) higher in the scores of religious respect in general.

Being Han ethnicity (-0.059,  $p < 0.05$ ), female (-0.008,  $p < 0.01$ ), married (-0.002,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a CCP member (-0.019,  $p < 0.05$ ), however, would cause religious tolerance to decline in general. However, when religious affiliation is controlled in Model (4), the ethnicity, marriage, and political identity gap in religious respect disappears. This suggests that the lower probability of religious affiliation for people of the Han ethnicity, married people and CCP party members may contribute to the lower religious tolerance in general for those people. After controlling for religious affiliation, the gender gap in religious tolerance in general, however, it becomes larger (from -0.008 to -0.014). This suggests that religious affiliation partially attenuates the negative association between female and religious tolerance in general.

Religious identities, regardless of the specific religious affiliations, all reported a significantly higher level of respect and tolerance of religion overall in China. Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and folk religions reported 0.13, 0.095, 0.087 and 0.047 scores higher in treating all religions respectfully and equally. In particular, respondents affiliated with foreign religions (Islam and Christianity) are more prone to treating all religions equally and respectfully.

### *Tolerating Religion Public*

Model (5) and (6) in Table 4.2 reported the effect of education on religious tolerance in public. Inconsistent with Hypothesis 1 that education increases tolerance, more educated individuals in China did not report more tolerance of religious expression in public. This association is robust even controlling for religious affiliation and sociodemographic factors.

Consistent with previous findings, urban residents are more tolerant of public expression of religion (0.02,  $p < 0.05$ ). Older people (-0.001,  $p < 0.05$ ) and married respondents (-0.044,  $p < 0.001$ ), however, are less tolerant of public expression of religion. CCP party members reported a lower tolerance of public expression of religion, yet it is significant only at a marginal level (-0.023,  $p = 0.06$  in Model (6)). Ethnicity, gender and income have no significant effect on religious tolerance in public.

Religious identity plays a role in the public expression of religion. Compared to atheists, Buddhists and Christians are more supportive for public expression of religion. Specifically, Christians and Buddhists score 0.107 ( $p < 0.001$ ) and 0.059 ( $p < 0.001$ ) higher in tolerating religious expression in public. Muslims and folk religion believers, however, are not significantly different from atheists in reporting a lower tolerance of religious expression in public.

### *Political Tolerance of Religion*

Model (7) and (8) reported the education effect on religious tolerance in political life. As expected by Hypothesis 2, educational attainment is related negatively with political tolerance of religion. Compared to the respondents with the lowest level of education, individuals with middle level and college level education reported respectively

0.018 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 0.033 ( $p < 0.01$ ) lower in tolerating religion in political life. When controlling for religious affiliation, the negative association between education and political tolerance increases. In Model (8), respondents with middle level education and college education scored 0.019 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 0.036 ( $p < 0.01$ ) lower in tolerating religion in political life.

Age, ethnicity, gender, marriage, income and even religious identity are not significant in predicting political tolerance of religion. Communist party members, however, are negatively associated with lower religious tolerance in political life (-0.029,  $p < 0.05$ ). Interesting, Muslims in China are less supportive of the political involvement of religion in China (-0.084,  $p < 0.001$ ). Different from previous findings that religious members are more supportive of religion in private life and in public life, Christians, Buddhists and folk religious believers are all very silent regarding the political engagement of religions in China.

### *Discussion and Conclusion*

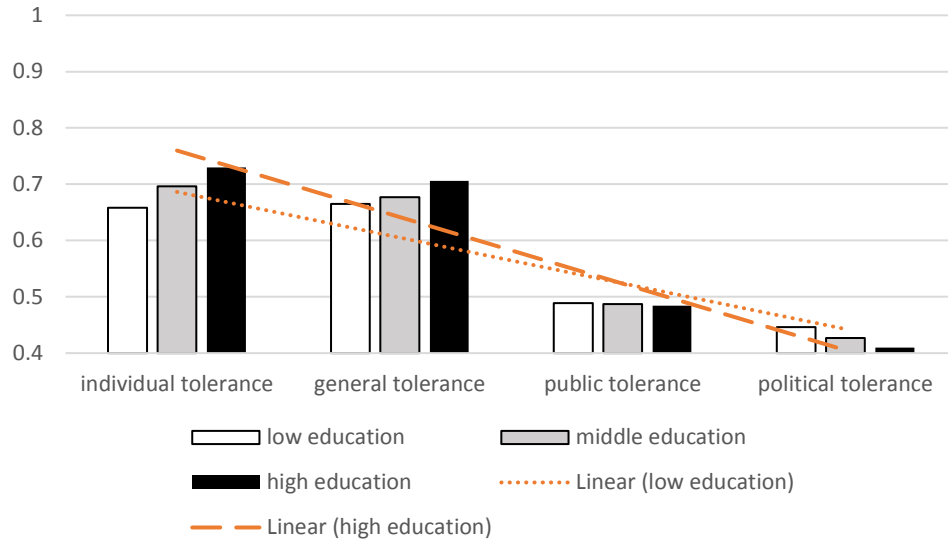
This is the first study that empirically explores the citizens' attitudes towards religion in contemporary China, where religion is regulated and even persecuted by the atheist government (Grim and Finke 2007; Iannaccone et al. 1997; Yang 2006, 2011). In particular, deriving from two contradictory perspectives—education as liberation perspective and education as socialization perspective—this study examines whether education in China increases tolerance of religion or allies with the anti-religious policy.

My study has several primary implications for advancing the sociological understanding of religious tolerance. One essential contribution to the literature on religious tolerance is to provide the empirical evidence of religious tolerance in the

context of China. Despite the vague assertion that religion is least tolerated in China (Grim and Finke 2007; Pew Research Center 2015), through a series of detailed religious tolerance measurement in the 2010 Wave of China General Social Survey, this study found that Chinese society has a very high religious tolerance in private and in general sphere, but has a low tolerance of religion in the public sphere and in politics. Such a finding may help resolve the paradox of why religious-related conflicts and anti-religious behaviors are rarely seen among citizens in a society where religion is strictly regulated and discriminated. That is, low tolerance of religion in public and in politics among the citizens provides public foundation for the anti-religious policies while high tolerance of religion in private allows individuals of different religious backgrounds to live peacefully together, thus reducing inter-religious conflicts (including atheist-religious conflicts).

In addition to providing insights into religious tolerance in China, this study has implications for understanding the role of public education in social tolerance. Whether education serves as a liberating process to increase tolerance or as a socialization mechanism of anti-religious ideology has been widely discussed in previous study (Gaasholt and Togeby 1995; Golebiowska 1995; Jackman 1978, 1981; Sullivan et al. 1994). The context of China provides a perfect arena to understand the role of education in shaping social attitudes. On one hand, public education in China trains individuals with higher cognitive capabilities and embeds individuals with a more pluralistic social network, which may increase tolerance towards the minorities. On the other hand, public education in China is highly embedded in the anti-religious ideology, which may socialize individuals with low religious tolerance. Based on the CGSS2010, which

includes a series of measurements of religious tolerance in private and in public life, I am able to probe into the role of education in religious tolerance comprehensively.



*Figure 4.2. Predicted Religious Tolerance based on Educational Attainment*

Interestingly, my findings provide evidence for both perspectives. That is, education in China can promote religious tolerance in private life while reducing religious tolerance in the public sphere and in politics. Figure 2 reported the estimated religious tolerance for people of different educational attainment controlling for other sociodemographic and religious items. When other variables are controlled, most educated people scored 0.73 and 0.706 out of 1 in tolerating different religious others in private life and in general respectively, which is significantly higher than the levels reported by people of middle level of education (0.696 and 0.677) and of low education (0.658 and 0.665). In contrast, most educated individuals only reported 0.484 and 0.41 out of 1 in tolerating religious expression in public and in politics, which is significantly

lower than the values reported by people of middle level education (0.487 and 0.427) and of lowest education (0.489 and 0.446).

Such a finding is more consistent with the view of civil society by Gramsci (1995). That is, despite generating a third autonomy arena beyond the state and the market as noted by Habermas (1974), civil society lies between individuals and the state, resisting and at the same time negotiating with the state to shape the culture hegemony over the whole society. This hegemony, according to Gramsci, includes both coercion and consent, the latter of which should be achieved through the hegemonic cooptation of the groups in the civil society (Gramsci 1995; Katz 2006). Education in China imparts individuals with the knowledge that public and political participation of religion is a threat to the overall society. Thus, with increased education, people become less tolerant of religion in the public sphere and in politics. Meanwhile, more educated people do not accept the entire package of anti-religious propaganda from the government. Compared with individuals of less education, more educated individuals are more open to religious diversity in their private lives. Therefore, education in China serves not only as a tool of socialization that imparts individuals with the anti-religious ideology in public, but also as a liberating mechanism that enable individuals to be more inclusive in their private life. Consequently, education in China enhances the public and private divide in religious tolerance.

Third, this study also probes the role of religious affiliation on religious tolerance in China. Previous studies have found that conservative religions are major contributors for low interreligious tolerance in western societies while the effect of religion on social tolerance is quite understudied in eastern society (Burdette, Ellison, and Hill 2005;

Clobert, Saroglou, and Hwang 2015; Emerson and Hartman 2006; Koopmans 2015; Smidt and Penning 1982; Wilcox and Jelen 1990; Wrench et al. 2006). Regardless of religious denomination, this study, however, finds that religious minorities in China are more tolerant of other religions in both private and public life. Specifically, religious minorities in China overall reported significantly higher values of tolerating religious others in their private life, in general and in public expression.

Such a finding should be further understood through the broader religious market in China. As China overall is a secular society with a strong anti-religious government, religions in China may take expanding the overall religious market as a priority over the competition with other religious organizations. Thus, members from different religious backgrounds are more supportive of each other regardless of their specific religious denominations both in their private and public life compared to the atheists. At the same time, to avoid annoying the atheist government, religious minorities may not want to report their support for religious engagement in politics (Stark, Byron, and Menken 2011). Even more, Muslims reported a lower political tolerance of religion compared to the atheist references. Such a finding is quite different from the conclusion we have received in western societies. In western societies, especially in countries with specific religious traditions, conservative religions are very hostile to religious others as they consider themselves the legitimate inheritors of the mainstream culture while perceive religious others as competitors (Smidt and Penning 1982).

The present findings also suggest new research questions for future research. First, even though my findings show that education increases religious tolerance in private and decreases religious tolerance in public, this study doesn't examine the

mechanisms of the educational effects on religious tolerance. According to previous studies, cognitive capabilities, pluralistic social networks, and trust may be important mediators of the positive association between education and tolerance (Bobo and Licari 1989; Borgonovi 2012; Dynes 1967; Sullivan et al. 1994). In addition, political identity and status quo may be important mediators for the negative association between education and public tolerance of religion in China (Bourdieu 1977; Jackman and Muha 1984). Further analysis should find proper indicators for these variables and examine the mechanism of the educational effect on religious tolerance.

Even though this study provides much evidence for us to understand religious tolerance in China, these conclusions should be evaluated with caution. As religion is marginalized and regulated in China, it is very possible that people, especially more educated people and religious minorities, are reluctant to report their religious attitudes honestly (Stark et al. 2011). Thus, more educated people may try to answer these questions within the frameworks of religious policies and religious minorities may try to be as friendly as possible to others religions. On the other hand, it is also possible that religious images and rituals are borrowed from each other in Asian society, and thus they don't feel exclusive towards religious others in their private lives (Palmer and Wickeri 2011; Shahar and Weller 1996; Stark 2001). To better understand these findings, further studies are encouraged firstly to verify whether religious members tend to hide their real religious attitudes from the interviewers and secondly to examine the determinants of religious tolerance in China based on alternative datasets.

Third, I have not examined the effect of social and religious contexts on the religious context, which is beyond the scope of this study. As mentioned by many studies,

the contextual factors such as level of economic development, level of inequality, education fraction would have an important influence on the attitude towards religious minorities (Berggren and Nilsson 2015; Frølund Thomsen 2012; Moore and Ovadia 2006; Persell et al. 2001). In particular, it would be interesting to see whether overall religiosity or religious diversity at the contextual level promotes religious tolerance in China. Two competing theories shed light on this question. The contact theory argue that people develop tolerance through interpersonal network and daily interaction, thus a higher presence of religious members overall would increase religious tolerance. While religious diversity at the contextual level would also encourage outgroup tolerance because individuals are able to interact with people from different religious background (Crisp and Turner 2009; Frølund Thomsen 2012; Liebkind and McAlister 1999). Yet the threatening theory suggests that a higher presence of religious others in a region would threaten the mainstream social identity and thus reduce tolerance (Bauman and Leech 2012; Hjern and Nagayoshi 2011; Schlueter and Scheepers 2010). Effected by the variation of religiosity and the level of religious diversity across China, further research can examine whether it creates a spatial variation of religious tolerance across regions (Moore and Ovadia 2006; Palmer and Wickeri 2011; Stark and Wang 2015; Ying 2009).

Despite the limitations acknowledged above, this study contributes greatly to understanding religious tolerance in China. It reveals that a high religious tolerance in private life and a low religious tolerance in public life coexist in Chinese society. Education as an institution enhances the tolerant gap of private-public life. That is, increased education increases religious tolerance in private life and in general, yet decreases religious tolerance in public and in politics.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion and Conclusion

The preceding three chapters investigate the rise of religion, the effect of religion on prosocial behavior, and social attitudes towards religion in contemporary China. The first study shows that social and political life strains produce subjective feelings of deprivation, which in turn motivate individuals' religious involvement. Even within a highly regulated religious economy, the second study finds that both individual and provincial level of religiosity (instituted religions) reduce law and rule violations. The third study demonstrates that Chinese society, overall, has high religious tolerance in private life yet low religious tolerance in public and political spheres. Educational differences highlight this public and private divide of religious tolerance.

The substance of these findings allow for comments on three important notions of religion in contemporary China. The first relates to "the secularization paradigm," which argues that religion will naturally decline as a society modernizes. Specifically, the processes of urbanization, industrialization, and the establishment of social welfare system replace religion as a provider of existential security and public goods with secular social institutions. Consequently, religion should lose its traditional social roles in modern society (Inglehart 1997; Norris and Inglehart 2011). However, instead of solving every problem in the society, modernity can create new social problems and life strains for individuals.

Particularly in China, mounting social problems emerge as China transforms from communist society to a market-oriented society (Chen 1997). First, rapid economic

growth and globalization are speeding up social time, which enhances stress. Second, economic and social inequality, crime, corruption, the collapse of traditional communities, and social conflicts can increase with economic development (Hannum and Xie 1994; Kanbur and Zhang 1999; Sun 2004). Individuals experiencing these social problems internalize them as subjective feeling of deprivation. To compensate for these subjective feelings of deprivation, individuals increase religious involvement. Thus, the rise of religion in contemporary China, on one hand, is due to decline of religious regulation in China. On the other hand, it is stimulated by new social strains and social problems generated by a rapid modernization process.

These studies challenge the Chinese government's assumption that religion is bad for society. From a Marxist perspective, religion is an "opium" of the people (Marx 1976). As religion is regulated and marginalized, many scholars speculate that religion will undermine prosocial behaviors. Similarly, previous empirical studies indicate that religion is not significantly related with subjective well-being, general trust and mental health (Bonelli and Koenig 2013; Hu 2013; Lu and Gao 2016). However, using a national representative data, Chapter Three demonstrates that religious belief and practice in China can protect individuals from various forms of law and rule violations. Not only an individual's level of religious commitment but also the overall provincial level of religiosity are significantly associated with decreased law and rule violations.

Chapter Four addresses common stereotypes about church-state relationships in China. Previous studies along with the western media tend to depict the relationship between government and religion in China as a suppress-resistant one (Grim and Finke

2006, 2010).<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is true in particular regions and religious cases, but the overall landscape of religion-state relationship is a more complex. Alongside government regulation and persecution, there is cooperation, negotiation, and reciprocity between religion and local government (Koesel 2014). My third study confirms that in the public and political spheres, religion is still perceived as a symbolic threat to authority, justifying government suppression and regulation (Yu 2005). Yet, in the private sphere, religion is highly tolerate in China. This explains the paradox that interreligious conflicts are rare in China. That is, both the religious believers and religious nones freely tolerate each other in private life.

Education in China, plays the role of both liberation and socialization. On one hand, Chinese education liberates citizens from traditional views and homogenous social networks; in turn, educated individuals have become more tolerant of marginal groups in their private life. On the other hand, education in China preaches official ideology, which depicts religion as a threat to the communist system, thus generating lower tolerance of religion in public and political spheres.

While these studies provide new insights into the nature of religion in China, more studies are needed. For example, limited by the availability of longitudinal data, models in Chapter Two did not examine the dynamic of political strains and religious involvement in China. That is, with more than two waves of data, further studies can detect the dynamic interaction between religious regulation and religious involvement in China. The potential model would be that religious involvement in China is related with

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<sup>1</sup> Also please see non-government website such as China aid. <http://www.chinaaid.org/>

higher exposure to political strains while political strains would motivate religious members to higher religious involvement.

Even though individuals increase religious involvement to compensate for their subjective deprivation, it is still unclear whether religion can compensate for these deprivations given that religion is marginalized and regulated in China. Further studies are encouraged to investigate into the effect of religious involvement on subjective well-being, mental health and other dimensions of social wellbeing considering the level of government regulation.

Nonetheless, these three empirical studies indicate that the role of religion in China is complex. Religion attracts many citizens who feel deprived by Chinese society, even though the media and educational systems are decidedly anti-religious. But surprisingly, while religious beliefs and practices are considered suspect by the Chinese government, they are correlated with prosocial and law-abiding behaviors. This suggests that religion is less of a political threat to communist rule than is assumed. Finally, Chinese education appears to actually increase the level of tolerance citizens have for private religiosity. My studies confirm and undermine some core ideas about the relationship between modernity, communism, and religion by exploring the unique and complex case of China.

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