When the PRC Party/State came to power in 1949 the government set out to insert itself and apply its own goals of governance to every niche in the economy and society. One such niche was religion. Rather than immediately trying to stamp out religion, as might be expected from its officially atheistic ideology, it adopted the policy inherited from the Kuomintang government it had just defeated of recognizing five religions, Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism\(^1\) and declaring traditional folk worship as superstition. It then sought to control religion by establishing state bodies to manage each of the five recognized communities. However, its governance of religion, in particular Protestantism, has been uneven and sometimes turbulent and tense, uneven because local enforcement has varied from place to place, turbulent and tense because what is and is not acceptable can suddenly change.

This paper will examine the PRC treatment of Protestantism as a governance issue. Governance, as defined by the UN, is 'the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).' Good governance requires 'fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially [through] an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force,' and that the government must follow the rule of law and be transparent and accountable (UNESCAP). To this, Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi add freedom of expression and association as criteria for good governance (2010). However, in the PRC, while the constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief, religious practice is subject to regulations that members claim interfere with beliefs; local governments can take action against individual churches while very similar churches are left alone elsewhere; and a province can engage in a concerted effort to dishonour Christianity's most sacred symbol, the cross, in an effort to reduce its public presence. Such actions cause uncertainly and tensions in the Protestant community, which is growing rapidly and some say will surpass the number of members of the CCP if it has not done so already. This could bode ill for a harmonious, stable society.

The paper is based mainly on academic and media articles and on field research in a variety of locations in the PRC: Beijing, Anhui, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Wenzhou, Nanjing and Xiamen) between 2009 and 2014 during which I attended church meetings and interviewed followers and pastors in both officially recognised and unregistered churches. In addition, as often happens in anthropological research, I had a 'key informant,' whom I will refer to by a pseudonym, Chen Qinghe. Because of his involvement with a student group while at university, Chen was barred from engaging in the career for which he prepared himself or from working in the public sector, including teaching. He later became a Christian and began teaching church law and church history in Protestant seminaries, supported by one of China's Christian networks. He travels widely in central China and is very familiar with the circumstances of churches and congregations there.

\(^1\) Catholicism and Protestantism are regarded as separate religions because they use different names for god, Tianzhu (lord of heaven) and Jidu (transliteration of Christ) respectively. Thus, 'Christian,' in the Chinese context, usually refers to Protestants. According to the Pew Centre, there were 9 million Catholics and 58 million Protestants in 2011.
Another significant source of information is from China Aid (duihua yuanzhu xiehui), an evangelical Christian organisation based in Midland, Texas, run by Mr. Bob Fu (Fu Xiqiu). Fu emigrated from the PRC to the United States in 1997 and is a fervent Christian. One of China Aid's functions is to gather information on government 'persecution' of, mainly Protestant, churches, their pastors and their members and post it on its website. It also publishes an annual report summarising the events of the year. It has a strong Christian bias, and its reports lack a contextual or sociological explanation for the official actions they describe, but it is the major source of information from the perspective of the churches; the official press in the PRC gives only the government's side. Its 2009 Report describes individual church-government relations as an 'encounter game between Caesar and the Church' (China Aid Report 2010:npn). Despite its shortcomings, news from China Aid is an important source of information.

Church and State in China

In order to manage religion, early in its rule the PRC government established the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) under the State Council, which later became the State Administration for Religious Affairs (guojia zongjiao shiwuju; SARA). It was charged with the oversight of religious matters such as selecting clergy, running seminaries and interpreting religious doctrines. It also established governing associations for each of the five recognized religions under the RAB. Those supervising Protestants and Catholics were labelled 'patriotic' because of their perceived links to foreign, 'imperialist' forces, and they were required to break any such links. This was more difficult for the Catholics as they were directly linked to the Vatican and recognized the Pope as their authority. Protestants drew less suspicion as they had much weaker links with the various missionary or church bodies in the West. Moreover, many Protestant churches had begun to cut ties with overseas bodies and establish 'patriotic' churches in the 1930s. Furthermore, although sometimes overlooked in materials from the West, some Protestant churches in China are indigenous, locally created and established, and never had overseas links or leaders from abroad. 2

The body governing Protestantism is the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), 'self' referring to self-propagation through indigenous missionary work, self-governance (no affiliation with foreign bodies) and self-funding. All Protestant churches were required to register with TSPM. Many did, and are referred to as TSPM churches, but some, insisting on a separation between God and Caesar, refused and continued to worship in private homes; 3 these are often referred to as 'house churches but are more correctly called unregistered churches. 4 They are formally illegal, and during the period leading up to the Cultural Revolution, many of their pastors and members suffered heavy persecution from the government or were jailed or even executed. TSPM churches, under government supervision, continued to meet and worship openly into the 1960s until the Cultural Revolution, at which time all religion was banned and remained so until the late 1970s. However, with government

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2 For example, the True Jesus Church (zhen yesu jiaohui) and the Assembly Hall Church (jiaohui juhuisuo).
3 There is a similar dichotomy among Catholics. Some Catholic churches registered with the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, which appoints bishops and supervises the parishes, but there are also Catholics which refused to and insisted on the Pope as their authority. They are referred to as 'underground' Catholic churches.
4 'House church' (jiating jiaohui) refers to any meeting in a home rather than a chapel or other dedicated space. TSPM church members who live too far away to attend a regular church also meet to worship in a people's homes. Many unregistered churches (bu dengji de jiaohui) have very small congregations, however, and so meet in a private home.
administration rendered inoperative because of the political chaos, in the early 1970s people began meeting and worshipping surreptitiously in private homes, rejuvenating unregistered churches. The number of unregistered church Christians actually grew during this most anti-religion period as people proselytized family members and neighbours. Those labelled bad elements, landlords or those having ties to the Kuomintang, were especially receptive, and by the end of the Cultural Revolution, the number of Protestants was somewhere between two to three million, compared with around 800,000 in the early 1950s.

In 1979, as part of the reform and opening up in the 1980s, religion was re-legalised. The state-church relationship formally changed in the 1980s when, in order to build regime legitimacy, the government exchanged more autonomy in social and economic affairs for loyalty to the regime and took a more relaxed view of religion. TSPM churches began to re-open, but it took some time before many local and middle-level leaders relaxed their attitudes toward religion. Party ideological principles, following their intense inculcation during the Cultural Revolution, were still quite strong among cadres, who were ever mindful of pleasing their superiors. Unregistered churches, especially, were suspected of being anti-government organisations and continued to be the targets of official action such as arresting their leaders and demanding a fine be paid for their release. However, after observing them for a while, local authorities realised that only rarely did churches pose a threat; more often they were an enhancement to their community. That, coupled with a change of national goals from politics and class struggle to economic development and rewards to cadres who performed well, meant that they paid less attention to religious matters.

In 1982, the government published Document 19, a new policy on religion. It still assumed that religion would eventually wither away though not for a long time. In the meantime the government would protect freedom of religious belief. It accepted that believing in religion was a private matter and that it would be counterproductive to attempt to coerce people to give up their beliefs, though Party members were forbidden to believe or participate in religious activities. It reiterated that the RAB would resume educating clerics and administering church buildings and organisations (Potter 2003:317-320; Yang 2012:50). It also contained the ‘three designates’ which ‘restricted religious activities to approved locations, required that they be conducted by approved clergy and limited their scope to the geographic sphere in which a given member of the clergy was permitted to practice (Fulton 2009). These provisions made itinerant evangelism illegal, greatly limited the number of persons allowed to conduct services and forbade individual clergy from leaving their base area to proselytise elsewhere.

As population controls were relaxed and religion re-legalised, Protestantism, especially the unregistered church variety, spread rapidly. To the more conservative evangelical Chinese Protestants, spreading the gospel is enthusiastically accepted as a sine qua non of being Christian. Weilander states that a common goal of the churches is to Christianize and thus change China (2009a, 2009b). Moreover, especially in rural areas, many regard Jesus as a powerful god who, like powerful folk deities, is able to grant worshippers' requests, a major one being healing the sick. This is a powerful appeal in areas where medical service provision is minimal (see, e.g. Aikman 2003:83).

Missionaries have also been an important force in spreading Protestantism, and there are several missionary networks in China. For example, the surge in Christianity occurred later in the northeastern provinces (Manchuria) than elsewhere (CASS 2010), and it was brought about through the efforts of missionaries from Henan, where Protestantism is quite strong,
South Korea, and to a lesser extent Taiwan. Also contributing to this effort were Christian businessmen from Wenzhou, who proselytized while travelling throughout China to invest (Cao 2011:30-34). Their efforts were replicated by Christians from other parts of China.

The 2010 Blue Book on Religion notes strong increases in the number of unregistered church Protestants in most regions from the 1980s with the increases in Manchuria occurring since the 1990s. Present estimates of Protestant believers range from twenty-three million (CASS 2010) to 130 million (Yu 2009:51). The latter figure, if correct, would represent one-tenth of the entire population, even more of the adult population since it is illegal to proselytise to those under eighteen. However, although coming indirectly from a SARA official, it likely errs significantly on the high side. Cao, whose estimate is probably more reliable, gives a figure of sixty million, only twenty per cent of whom are in registered churches (2011:5; see also Liu Peng 2010b). More recently Professor Fenggang Yang has estimated the number of Christians, including Catholics, at 100 million (Yang 2015). Among Protestants, the CASS survey found that the majority were in TSPM churches, but it is likely that unregistered church members are under-counted in official investigations. It is noteworthy that the growth in both forms is in younger people. Congregations I attended were overwhelmingly made up of persons between twenty to fifty with the elderly much in the minority.

Following an assessment of the number of believers, the Tiananmen Incident and the demise of Communism in Eastern Europe, the government acknowledged a need for tolerance toward religion. In February 1991, the Central Committee and the State Council jointly issued Document 6 which spelled out new rules and restrictions on clerics and worship premise registration and also allowed local administrations to issue regulations to fit their own circumstances. It called for renewed pressure on religious groups to adjust their teaching to conform more closely to regime goals, but it also promised not to interfere with normal religious activities. In 1993, then President Jiang Zemin invited the leaders of the five religious organisations to Zhongnanhai and asked them to ‘take active steps to guide religions in a direction compatible with socialist society’ combat heterodoxy, increase the adaptation of religion to socialism and suppress religious groups that resisted state control (Encyclopedia nd; Potter 2003:321-322).

A further major change, especially for unregistered churches, occurred in 2005, with Jiang Zemin's declaration that religion would not die out in the near future but would continue to exist for sometime to come. Moreover, President Hu Jintao and other senior leaders have publically recognized the role religion can play in the development of a harmonious society (Lazzarotto 2007, Cody 2008). That year the government promulgate a new Religious Affairs Regulations that revised its position toward unregistered churches. Although they were not legalised and the formal requirement to register with TSPM remained in place, unregistered churches were permitted not to register. However, those that did not were not allowed to open a bank account or have an official chop for 'signing' documents, which hampers their ability to grow and fulfil what they see as their mission.

The sum of these regulations and pronouncements is that unregistered churches are formally illegal, but their existence is recognised, and they are tolerated within limits and generally left alone, though local officials may pressure pastors to affiliate with TSPM or even close them down. The problem is that the limits are not formally defined and official action is not uniform.

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5 The first question from those conducting the survey was whether a person living in the house visited was a Christian. As membership in an unregistered church is illegal, it is likely that many unregistered church members would say no.
Law, Regulation, Ambiguous, Inconsistent and Post-Facto Application

The PRC government frequently reiterates the principle of rule according to law (yi fa zhi guo), however, even interpreting this to mean rule by rather than of law, it has had difficulty achieving it. One reason is that doing the right thing by one's kin and friends, one's zijiren, (literally self-people), was and still is more important than obedience to an abstract and impersonal set of laws. Another is the ambiguity of the language used to write laws and regulations. Cao states that Chinese law suffers from 'excessive generality and vagueness' (2004:95), however, she also notes that some argue that this is desirable:

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\ldots \text{generality and flexibility captures the essential guide in Chinese lawmaking that legislation must reflect the unitary nature of the state while satisfying the needs of regional diversity, and this also accords with the principle of legislative stability as it permits the effective amendment of the law through changes in interpretation rather than through alterations to the actual statutes.}' (Cao 2004:96)
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For example, the government promises to protect all 'normal' religious activity, 'normal' often being in the eyes of local government officials.

A third is that local authorities generally follow the pragmatism of Deng Xiaoping's not caring if the cat is black or white so long as it catches rats. There is a very poor area in western Anhui province that was once a major illegal amphetamine manufacturing centre. Addicts sold their blood to buy drugs, and many contracted AIDS in the process. Unregistered churches there were more effective than other bodies in helping people to quit drugs, and when local TSPM churches, jealous of the success the unregistered church programs were having, tried to get police support to pressure the unregistered churches to align with TSPM, the police ignored them because they recognised the effectiveness of the unregistered church program (Chen, personal communication).

Two other factors particularly relevant to this paper are the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over the law, which can extend to its members, and the far from complete implementation of law. Laws, from local regulations (tiaoli) to provisions of the Chinese Constitution (fa lü) are often implemented on the basis of convenience, political considerations, or the situation at hand.\footnote{The fact that judges are paid by local governments ensures that their decisions will reflect local conditions—and demands.}

Unregistered church-Government Relations

As noted above, although in practice there has been much more tolerance toward unregistered churches since the promulgation of the new Religious Affairs Regulations in 2005, they were not legalised. Most of the tens of thousands of unregistered churches carry out their affairs without interference from the authorities, but in a small number of cases, some of which have become causes célèbres, officials have taken severe actions against particular congregations resulting in their division into smaller assemblies, closure, destruction of church buildings, confiscation of church assets or materials, or their ministers being subject to verbal, mental or physical abuse, harassment, detention, gaoling or sentences to labour camps.
Although the more well known cases of harassment have occurred since 2008, China Aid Reports claim that such actions have occurred since at least 2004 (Homer 2009:52), and reports in 2009, 2013 and 2016 Reports state that they increase each year (China Aid 2010; Morning Star News 2013, Ritchie 2016). The 2013 Report further charges that authorities target unregistered churches in a planned manner, that in 2012 the government began a three-phase plan to 'wipe out unregistered churches' and compel them to join the official TSPM system. In Phase One, January-June 2012, SARA ‘secretly investigated’ unregistered churches and created files on them. In the second phase, through 2014, it pressured unregistered churches to register. In the third, which began in 2015 will run through to 2025, it will shut down unregistered churches that refuse to register (Morning Star News). I will document several of these cases below from which we can derive a de facto 'social contract' under which churches may operate and red lines that they cannot cross.

Probably the most well-known and enduring harassment is of Beijing's Shouwang Church. Its problems with the authorities began in 2008, around the time it tried to register as a civil organisation in order to avoid affiliating with SARA. The following year its landlord, under pressure from Beijing officials, cancelled the lease on the premises in which it met. Members then began meeting in Haidian Park, but the authorities soon closed the park on Sundays, the sign on the locked gate reading 'to facilitate the movement of plants.' After some to-ing and fro-ing during which the authorities detained its main pastor on Sundays, and facing an imminent visit by President Obama, the government arranged for it to meet in a TV studio. The church then tried to purchase its own premises, but the government blocked the sale, and several months later, it had to vacate the studio. From 2010 through 2012 it had nowhere to meet, its founding pastor was under house arrest, 1600 of its members were detained; 60 of them were evicted from their homes, ten lost jobs for being members, some were sent back to their hometowns, and some were confined to their homes on weekends. Members continued to meet outdoors, but in 2015, police began arresting them for 'disturbing public order' (Liu Peng, 2010a; Morning Star News 2013; Ritchie 2016). Members now meet in small groups in each other's homes.

The Guangzhou Liangren Church also struck trouble in 2008 after several members, including the pastor's wife, went to assist Wenchuan earthquake victims, which included establishing a children's home. The pastor was subsequently detained on several occasions, and worshippers were chased away from meetings. In 2010, the authorities locked the congregation out of the church, forcing it to move. Each time the congregation found a new meeting venue, the authorities pressured the landlord to evict them. They also repeatedly ordered the pastor to stop meeting, and demanded that his church affiliate with the TSPM movement. He refused. In the meantime, his wife was in the United States speaking on democracy and religious freedom. Officials from the church later attempted to establish an experimental foreign language kindergarten in Guangxi, but in 2014, Guangdong police crossed the provincial border to arrest them. They served two years in prison for printing and selling 'for profit' non-government educational materials. They were released in 2016 (China Aid 5/5/10; Monitor China 10/11/10; Gledhill, Ruth, 2016).

Shanghai's Wanbang Church, like the two above, is a large (over 1000 members) urban church, many members of which are educated professionals. It was active in social work and philanthropy in Shanghai. After its pastor called a meeting of the United Unregistered Church Pastors, which, since unregistered churches are illegal, is undoubtedly an unregistered organisation, he found his church banned and the lease on the worship premises terminated. Soon afterwards SARA officials and police raided the church and interrogated the pastor.
Police also visited all who had attended the church and forbade them from further participation in it. The Wanbang Church appears to have closed (Wang 2009; China Aid 07/11/09; Gospel Herald, 6/11/09).

The Linfen (Shanxi) Church is a very large complex of several churches in Shanxi with 50,000 worshippers and is socially active in the community. As it has several purpose-built chapels, it obviously had tacit official approval. However, in September 2009, officials and police entered the construction site of a chapel attacking members who were sleeping there (twenty of whom were hospitalised), and ransacked the building. Authorities arrested five leaders, charging them with illegally occupying agricultural land and disrupting transportation order (member traffic to and from churches). In a one day trial two months later leaders were given sentences of 3½ to seven years. Linfen Church continues to be monitored, but it is still operating and training preachers and deacons (Morning Star News 2013; MSNBC; Gospel Herald 23/09/09; Lifen Church 2016).

Police in Beijing stopped an unregistered church in Beijing as it was conducting a baptismal service in a local waterway (China Aid 25/08/09) and the ethnic Korean pastor of Immanuel Church (Beijing) was banned from his ministry for contact with Korean missionaries. It also declared the church and an affiliated nursing home to be 'illegal structures' and demolished them (China Aid 6/08/09). Moreover, in rural areas, churches or members can attract trouble on the basis of being cult members or engaging in evangelism while providing free medical services. The accused are often sent to education-through-labour camps (Morning Star News 2013).

Despite their vulnerability, unregistered churches continue to grow. The 2016 China Aid Report states that at least 1000 have been established in Guangdong in the previous three years and over 100 in Beijing itself). The Report also claims that government suppression efforts have increased, shutting them down, pressuring landlords to terminate leases, cutting off water and electricity, arresting pastors and pressuring them to register with TSPM (Ritchie 2016).

**Conflicts with TSPM Churches**

Until 2014, TSPM churches had generally been left alone. The very small number against which officials took action had either engaged in illegal activities or run afoul of local interests.

- The Rizhao TSPM church in Shandong was abolished because its legally established seminary had engaged in unauthorised training of students. Authorities confiscated Bibles, computers, and other materials, stating that they were being used for 'illegal religious training at an unregistered church location.' Officials also revoked the seminary’s registration certificates and ordered that other church property be confiscated as a penalty (China Aid 25/08/09).
- Police chased members out of the chapel and occupied the site of the Changchunli TSPM Church in Jinan, Shandong. China Aid alleges that the director and deputy director of the Jinan Municipal Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs wanted to demolish the church buildings to take control of the land, and that they bribed the demolition and removal officials and manipulated the presidents of the Jinan Two

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7 The seizure of urban residential property for redevelopment is a very common occurrence in China.
Associations, who signed an agreement authorizing the removal and demolition of the church under duress (China Aid 09/07/09, 27/09/10).

- In 2012, the pastor and key members of the Henan, Nanle County Christian Church suffered official persecution because, according to China Aid, of their involvement in standing up for underprivileged people (China Aid 2013).

These could be seen as routine actions, taken for local reasons. However, in 2014, the Zhejiang Provincial Government took concerted action against Christian churches in the province, demanding that crosses atop churches be removed and attached to the front façade of buildings. It also ruled that they could be no larger than 1/10 the height and had to be painted a colour that blended with the colour of the wall to which they were attached rather than the red preferred by church members. According to the Global Times, 'almost all the crosses in churches in Zhejiang Province had been removed between 2014 and 2015' (Global Times 2016), various reports putting the number between 1200 and 2000 churches. Ninety-five per cent of affected churches are TSPM churches (Melchior 2016), few unregistered churches being large or well-established enough to have their own buildings, particularly buildings that are as large and eye-catching as those affiliated with TSPM. A few Catholic churches have also been affected (Southerland 2105). There are also a small number of reports of crosses being removed from churches in other provinces, but these seem to be individual cases and not linked to the Zhejiang program.

This cross removal program took place simultaneously with a province-wide urban renewal scheme, the Three Transformations and One Demolition (sangai yichai): transform old residential areas, factories and 'urban villages,' i.e. shantytowns, and demolish illegal buildings, some of which were churches, to make way for new development. Reports from Christian organizations conflate demolition and removal of crosses, perhaps because the newly completed Sanjiang Church, located in Yongjia County near Wenzhou, was razed early in 2014, near the time that the cross removals began. However, the Sanjiang Church clearly violated the conditions of its building permit. Completed in 2013 and set against a mountain and visible from a freeway, it occupied 10,000 square meters but had approval for only 2000 square meters. Previously, that would not have been a problem. According to Zhang Yi, a journalist for the Global Times, 'Such a bypassing of regulations is commonplace in Zhejiang Province as the religious environment has been relatively relaxed in recent years' (Zhang 2014). A church member told Ian Johnson that the local government had encouraged the congregation to build an impressive church: 'This will be your last church for 20 years, so make it big.' The member also stated, 'They also told us that the development zone was a big project and needed a big church as a sign of how this is an outward-looking community.' An RAB official stated 'officials said it could be bigger, but perhaps this was a mistake' (Johnson 2014).

Although the urban renewal program did not stipulate cross removal per se or churches as a target interviews carried out by Financial Times staff, including with local officials, and documents obtained by the paper, 'it is clear the destruction of the Sanjiang church was the beginning of a concerted year-long campaign to rein in Christianity in the province'

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8 The Two Associations (liang hui) are the TSPM and the Chinese Christian Council (CCC), both official bodies established to manage Protestants.
9 Crosses are painted red to commemorate the blood spilled when Mao Zedong tried to wipe out Christianity.
10 Catholics are far fewer in number than Protestants in China, constituting about 13.5 per cent of Christians. They are also concentrated in more northern provinces.
However, the program was not merely a subterfuge; of the 4000 Protestant churches in Zhejiang twenty were totally or partially razed, moreover, officials stated that demolished religious buildings made up only 0.26 per cent of all razed structures and that Protestant churches comprised only 2.3 per cent of the affected religious buildings (Qian 2016).

There are several factors involved in the cross removal program. First, President Xi Jinping, since assuming office in 2013, has insisted on enforcing orthodoxy in ideology, which includes a rejection of foreign ideas. In 2014 his government identified religion as one of four 'severe challenges' to national security, and soon afterward, it issued a memo demanding that provincial authorities "see clearly the political issues behind the cross(es)" that dominate the architectural landscape in Zhejiang Province, urging them to limit the spread of Christianity' (Melchior 2016). More recently, at a meeting on religious affairs, he stated that religious groups should 'merge religious doctrines with Chinese culture, abide by Chinese laws and regulations, and devote themselves to China’s reform and opening-up drive and socialist modernisation to contribute to the realisation of the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation' (Gan 2016).

Second, the cross removal order came from the Zhejiang Party Secretary, Xia Baolong, after he saw the Sanjiang Church during a visit to Wenzhou. The church dominated the mountainside on which it was set and was visible from a freeway. Its illuminated red cross stood atop a spire measuring 55 meters from the ground. Xia was angered that such a large church, representing a foreign ideology, could occupy such a conspicuous space. According to the pastor of another church, Xia exclaimed, 'This is brazen! Whose domain is this, the Communist Party’s or the Christians’ (Cao & Pastor L 2015)? An internal government document extended his sentiments to Christian churches in general and instructed provincial officials to 'see clearly the political issues behind the cross(es) that dominate the architectural landscape in Zhejiang Province' (Melchior 2016) and to reduce Christianity's public profile: 'Over time and in batches, bring down the crosses from the rooftops to the façade of the buildings' (Yang 2015).

Moreover, the cross removal program was accompanied by efforts to Sinicise Christianity. The Zhejiang government criticised the Gothic style architecture of Christian churches and proposed a regulation stating that ‘religious buildings should embody the local style and cultural features.' There are also rumours that churches will be required to fly the national flag and establish internal CCP offices, though officials have refuted these (Global Times 2016). However, it has promulgated a program of Five Entries and Five Transformations (五进五化, wujin wuhua), respectively, laws and regulations, health care, popular science, support for the elderly and building harmony to enter the church; and localized religion (i.e. architectural style), standardized management, indigenised theology, transparent finances, and adapted teachings (e.g. SARA efforts to interpret Bible verses to support government goals) to transform Christianity.

TSPM general secretary Kan Baoping praised various churches built by foreign missionaries employing the styles of Buddhist or Daoist temples, remarking, 'Only when Chinese architectural style has become the dominant style of Christian churches in China can we say "this is Chinese Christianity"' (Ritchie 2016). And in 2015 Christians were urged to donate

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11 It is likely that President Xi Jinping would also support this sentiment. In a 2014 speech in which he criticized 'weird buildings,' he stated that Chinese art should 'disseminate contemporary Chinese values, embody traditional Chinese culture and reflect Chinese people's aesthetic pursuit' (Ramzy 2014). Moreover, under Xi, the
blood during their Easter celebration, which Christians saw as 'turning the core belief of Christianity—the shedding of Christ’s blood for the sins of mankind—into a blood drive opportunity' (Ritchie 2016). Many pastors and members were very critical of the Five Entries and Five Transformations (Cao and Pastor L 2015) and complained that they would transform Christian churches into mere philanthropic organisations (Ritchie 2016).

Third is the rapid growth of Christianity, especially Protestantism, in China. At the beginning of the PRC, China had fewer than one million Protestants. During the Cultural Revolution, although religion was completely banned, the number grew to 2-3 million. The present figure ranges between 67 million (Pew 2011) to 100 million (Yang 2015), more than half of whom are affiliated with unregistered churches. If the latter estimate is correct, there are more Christians than members of the Communist Party. Probably more disturbing to the authorities is that in the 1980s, Christians tended to be poor, uneducated, female and elderly, but since then, large numbers of them are urban, well-educated, and aware.

Why would the cross removal program take place in Zhejiang? Its percentage or number of Christians is relatively high, about four million out of a total population of about 57 million, but these are significantly lower than Henan or Anhui. However, Christians there are prosperous, and Christianity is prominent there; Hangzhou's Chongyi Tang, 12,000 square meters in size, is China's largest mega-church with 10,000 members and a capacity of 5500 worshippers at a service (Cao & Pastor 2015). In Zhejiang's Wenzhou municipality one in nine is a church member, and there are several large, conspicuous churches there, some of which, despite being registered with TSPM, acted quite autonomously in the past. Cao Nanlai, who did a study of Wenzhou Christians, writes that, although cadres cannot themselves become Christians, they are embedded in it through their networks of family and friends, and like others, they take part in local Christmas festivities (Cao 2011:3, 4). Moreover, its twenty-plus Bible and theology sessions train hundreds of evangelists each year.

**Overall Religion Governance Goals**

What are the overall goals of government actions against churches? Actions taken against unregistered churches seem to be following a pattern established over the past decade and do not appear to be changing or increasing. Some larger, prominent urban churches are harassed or closed and their pastors and key members threatened, intimidated, detained or arrested. Smaller, rural inconspicuous churches are generally ignored or allowed to continue, though a small proportion of them are harassed or forced to close. There may be a slight rise in number of churches targeted, but it is not a great number. According to the 2016 China Aid Report, at least 60 unregistered churches in Guangdong were closed down in 2015, but in the three previous years more than 1000 were opened there and an additional 100 in Beijing. Moreover, although the Report notes a 8.62 per cent rise between 2014 and 2015 in the instances of persecution of Christians or abuse of their human rights, it notes cases involving cross removal account for most of the increase (Ritchie 2016).

Small unregistered churches, though most are disregarded, can attract official attention when congregation size exceeds thirty, so in areas where officials are wont to interfere, pastors with more followers will hold multiple services. However, most local cadres are disinclined to

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12 Christians comprise approximately 5% of China's population, 3.7% of Zhejiang's, 5.3% of Anhui's and 6.1% of Henan's.
spend their time and effort policing small unregistered churches as the penalty for fomenting social unrest by harassing them far outweigh the rewards for doing so. Some, in fact, were benign toward them. One interviewed pastor was renting his apartment, the front room of which was the venue for the worship service, from the local police chief's wife; another's second child was overlooked because of his good relationship with the local officials. Large, urban unregistered churches, such as those whose cases were discussed above, can attract unwanted official attention because of their size, the prominence of their membership, or contact with or support from foreigners. Actions taken against TSPM churches other than those in Zhejiang are small in number and occur for a variety of reasons; no pattern is apparent.

The cross removals in Zhejiang, however, represent a new phenomenon and one that Professor Fenggang Yang finds puzzling: given the rapid and continuing growth of Christianity and his estimate of 100 million Christians—seven per cent of the population—why would a government that feels insecure and strongly emphasises stability risk offending so many people (2015)? There are two aspects to this question: first, that it is part of the Xi Jinping regime's tightening up on the slack that has been granted in the enforcement of laws and rules and its crackdown on the expression of alternate ideologies or visions of the Chinese dream; and second that it is a 'salami-slicing' exercise, a calculated move aimed at what the government sees as a win for itself at the expense of a loss for Christians that in its view is too small to spark off unrest.

Taking the latter first, some Zhejiang Christians fear that the cross removals are an experiment to test whether the discontent it caused among Christians is manageable; if so, it could be extended nationwide. Giving weight to such a concern, it is improbable that the program was merely the result of Party Secretary Xia's displeasure at seeing the completed Sanjiang Church. He and Xi served together in Zhejiang from 2003-2007, and that, combined with China's centralised governance on such issues, makes it likely to be more than a local decision (see Anderlini 2014). While there are scattered reports of cross removals elsewhere, they are not patterned or concentrated in any locale, and there are presently no signs that the government intends to extend it. Moreover, the Zhejiang actions appear to have been calculated not to cause resistance. Zhang Yi, writing in the Global Times, states,

Local governments must approach sensitive issues such as those involving religion and ethnic groups in a more open and legitimate manner. They should respect the customs of particular groups and take their concerns into consideration. Authorities should also play their role in guiding social groups to raise their awareness and self-regulating ability under the framework of the law. (Zhang 2014)

Additionally, regarding the razing of church buildings found to be illegal, Johnson cites a government report that states, 'Be particular about tactics, be careful about methods. Closely seize the [issue of] "illegal construction." This is crucial to investigate and prosecute from the perspective of laws and regulations to avoid inviting heavy criticism.' (Johnson 2014). The evidence thus points to a calculated exercise designed to reduce the visibility of Christianity in a province in which it is both popular and prosperous. The removal of crosses from atop church buildings was met with resistance, and those who protested or tried to obstruct the

13 At a 2015 young writers symposium in Brisbane, in reply to a comment that the Chinese government had offended university students by its restrictions on the internet, Murong Xuecun stated that the regime was much better at making enemies than making friends.
process were detained. However, churches were not closed and worship was not impeded. As a recent *Economist* article states, 'The party oscillates between wanting to embrace and to crush [Christians]' (2016:7).

The cross removals in Zhejiang do, however, fit into the generally increased crackdown on any force--activists, lawyers, publishers, authors, NGO employees or the internet—that represents an ideology or worldview that can be seen as a competitor with that of the Party/State. In mid-2012, the government published Document 9, which prohibited the promulgation of seven dangerous Western liberal ideas including constitutional democracy, universal values, civil society, neoliberalism, and freedom of the press. Around the same time, the *People's Daily*, in a warning against American efforts to undermine China, identified rights lawyers, underground religion (unregistered churches) dissidents, internet leaders and disadvantaged social groups as forces that work through grass-roots society to democratise China, which would undermine CCP rule. These were soon popularly dubbed the 'new Five Black Categories' (*xin heiwulei*).14

In addition, the government opposes the influence of overseas NGOs and organised grass-roots activities not sanctioned and controlled by the state, especially those aimed at bringing about social change or improvements to society because such efforts imply that the state is not doing its job. It is also very sensitive about activities that rouse the public. Thus, activists such as the five feminists who were detained in 2015 on a charge of 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble' (*xunxin zishi*) because they had planned International Women's Day protests against sexual harassment on public transport in a number of cities. As sexual harassment is illegal, one might say that they were acting in concert with the government, but by organising themselves and others they crossed a red line.

Activist lawyers, such as those arrested on July 9, 2015, represent a threat because they advocate a system of rule of law wherein people have legal rights that are guaranteed in the law. This effort is inadvertently supported by Xi's emphasis on the law as a governance tool, though he sees law as a way to control people rather than a guarantee of their rights. They have also taken on human rights cases and those of people who have been harmed by shoddy or hazardous products such as children harmed by melamine in powdered milk or killed by the substandard construction of the schools that collapsed in the 2007 Wenchuan earthquake killing 70,000 school children. These lawyers are no longer content with finding political legitimacy and fairness in the laws of China: they’re looking at matters from the perspective of international human rights conventions, putting in a quandary the Chinese officials who are framing activists as political criminals or prisoners of conscience. (Ji 2016)

What they do sets in people's minds that they have rights, that the regime is limited by the law. They thus use the courts to effect change, which in a sense makes the courts independent of the executive and takes away the latter's monopoly on governance.

Christianity is foreign in origin, moreover it represents an ideology that, as demonstrated by its rapid growth, is attractive and is a competitor to regime ideology. The regime recognizes this in regarding Catholicism as an important factor in the fall of communism in Poland

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14 Mao identified the original Five Black Categories—landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists—during the Cultural Revolution as enemies of the people.
The unregistered churches are mostly small, moreover, most Christians are interested only in worshipping, not in political activism, but the regime still opposes them because the decentralisation of Protestantism makes them difficult to control (Anderlini 2014) and because believers envision a higher authority than the state. The larger ones are a greater potential threat to government because of their size, their prominence combined with their formal illegality (they visibly decline to follow government dictates) and, at least in the case of the Shouwang Church, the number of professionals and intellectuals in its membership. Christianity is thus similar in representing an alternate model such as the one the activist lawyers, half of whom, including three of the four of those who were recently tried in Tianjin, are Protestant Christians (Brown 2015) represent. They thus present a governance problem to the CCP regime.

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