

The Failure of the Campaign to Demolish Church Crosses in Zhejiang Province, 2013–2016

A Temporal and Spatial Analysis

Fenggang Yang

Center on Religion and Chinese Society, Purdue University

fyang@purdue.edu

Abstract

In 2013, the Zhejiang government initiated a campaign to demolish church crosses (DCC) throughout the province in the name of landscape improvement. In April 2016, the campaign was abruptly and quietly halted. The termination of the campaign was primarily due to unremitting resistance by Christians in Zhejiang. This article provides a temporal and spatial analysis of the DCC campaign that reveals multiple failures on the part of the Zhejiang authorities, including missing several self-imposed deadlines to remove all church crosses in the province, inconsistently implementing the campaign in various regions, and causing the breakdown of the bridging mechanism between Christian churches and the party-state. The failure of the DCC campaign is an important empirical case for studies of religion and Chinese society. It indicates that the church-state equilibrium in China may be approaching a tipping point.

Keywords

cross demolition campaign – religious resistance – Zhejiang

* This article is a collective work of the 2017 research team of the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue. We thank the Reverend Leguo Zheng for the list of churches affected by the cross removal campaign. The research was made possible in part by the grants from the John Templeton Foundation and the Henry Luce Foundation for spatial studies of religion in Chinese society.

浙江省2013-2016强拆教堂十字架运动的失败：一个时空分析

摘要

自2013年底开始，浙江政府以美化环境的名义发动了拆除全省教堂十字架的运动。到2016年的4月，该运动悄然停止。这场运动之所以半途而终，主要是由于浙江基督徒坚持不懈的抵抗。本文通过对强拆教堂十字架运动的时间与空间分析，展示浙江政府在此运动中的多种失败，包括多次错过自定的拆除全省所有十字架的截止日期，各地在贯彻执行省政府命令中的力度差异，以及基督徒教会与党国沟通的桥梁机制遭到破坏。强拆十字架运动的失败是研究宗教与中国社会的一个重要的实证案例，该案例预示着中国的政教关系或许正在趋近一个动态平衡的临界点。

关键词

强拆十字架运动，宗教抵抗，浙江

As Christmas carols filled the enormous sanctuary of Chongyi Church in Hangzhou in December 2017, its former senior pastor, the Reverend Gu Yue-se, walked out of jail. He had been imprisoned for about a year following his public statements against the campaign to demolish church crosses in Zhejiang. At the time, he was also the president of the Christian Council in Zhejiang, a government-sanctioned organization. The open challenge to an ongoing political campaign by a Christian leader holding such a high position in the officially sanctioned religious organization was unprecedented in China under Communist rule. In response, the Zhejiang authorities stripped Gu of his offices in the church and on the council, arrested him, and carried on the campaign in spite of strong Christian resistance. In April 2016, however, the campaign was abruptly halted. One year later, in April 2017, the initiator and commander of the campaign, Xia Baolong, lost his powerful position as the Chinese Communist Party secretary of Zhejiang Province. At the end of 2017, Reverend Gu was released. These developments indicated that the campaign to demolish church crosses in Zhejiang had come to an end, even though its official termination had not been announced by the Chinese authorities.

The campaign to demolish church crosses (DCC) was a political experiment to suppress Christianity in the name of nonreligious causes. It was cloaked within a broader operation for landscape improvement called “Three Rectifications, One Demolition” (*san gai yi chai* 三改一拆, hereafter TROD), which was billed as an effort to renovate or “rectify” old residential neighborhoods,

old factory grounds, and old villages enclosed in newly developed urban areas, and to demolish illegal structures. The initial TROD operation plan, released in early 2013, made no mention of religion or religious buildings. By the end of the year, however, the TROD operation had revealed that its goals also included removing crosses from church rooftops. This peculiar inclusion baffled Christians and many other people: how could the removal of crosses from the spires of officially approved churches be classified as landscape improvement? Churches refused to comply, and when authorities attempted to forcefully tear down crosses from church rooftops, many Christians rose up to guard their crosses and rally in protest. The campaign and the Christian opposition to the government campaign continued for more than two years, from late 2013 to early 2016. Even though believers suffered injuries and imprisonment, as well as other punishments, the tenacious resistance ultimately forced the government to terminate the campaign. It ended without a formal conclusion and without the kind of celebration routinely held after successful campaigns. Zhejiang did eventually celebrate the completion of the general TROD operation with an exhibition in Hangzhou in early 2017, but the exhibition did not highlight the demolition of church crosses and received little public attention.

To date, the DCC campaign remains the most severe large-scale suppression of Christianity since the Cultural Revolution. It resulted in substantial damage, as more than 1,500 crosses on church spires were taken down and a few churches, including the magnificent Sanjiang Church, were completely demolished (Hao and Liu 2018), and the breakdown of the relationship between the party-state and Christians (Ying 2018). Moreover, the negative effects of the campaign were felt by millions of Christians in Zhejiang and beyond (McLeister 2018). On the other hand, however, the campaign fell short of its initial goal to remove all crosses from church buildings in Zhejiang and tame Christians into submission. In the end, the majority of churches retained or re-erected their rooftop crosses. Furthermore, the campaign drove a wedge between leaders of officially recognized churches and the state. Not only did a number of affected Christian leaders quit their positions in official churches in protest, but some also became active in house churches, which have refused to join government-sanctioned associations and have been a perennial challenge to the control apparatus of religious affairs in China (Hunter and Chan 1993; Yang 2012; Vala 2017).

The failure of the DCC campaign has great social and political significance. It demonstrates the limits of party-state authoritarianism and the mass power of resistance by a faith community. There have been many popular protests in China under Communist rule, such as the 1989 democracy movement, the Falun Gong spiritual movement, and the resistance to land-grabbing in economic development, among others (Perry 2001; O'Brien 2008). These protests have been routinely crushed by the powerful party-state. Unlike most other popular

protests, which are driven by pragmatic needs and economic goals, Christian resistance to the DCC campaign engaged in symbolic contention; and unlike Falun Gong, which was a new indigenous religious movement, Christianity is a world religion legally practiced in China by large numbers of believers. The direct motivation for the Christian resistance was to defend the sacred symbol of the cross on top of church buildings, an emblem that inspires sacrificial behavior and evokes a spirit of solidarity among the Christian faith community at large, both in China and around the world. At another level, resistance to the campaign was a fight for religious freedom and for the rule of law: churches took the authorities to court and alerted international media, demanding that the authorities uphold the rule of law and their rights to religious freedom as inscribed in China's constitution and in official party-state documents.

This article provides a temporal and spatial analysis of the campaign to demolish church crosses under the guise of the TROD operation. We will first provide a chronicle and analysis of major events, paying special attention to important documents, key figures, and turning points. Then, we will map the Christian churches in Zhejiang as recorded in an economic census in 2004, visualizing the spatial distribution and rapid growth of Christianity in recent decades. Finally, we will map the affected churches in the DCC campaign.

This temporal and spatial analysis will illustrate multiple failures of the Zhejiang authorities in this campaign. Not only did they miss multiple announced deadlines to demolish all crosses on church spires, they also eroded the bridging mechanism between the church and the state that had taken years to carefully cultivate and alienated Christians from the current regime. The failure of the DCC campaign indicates that the delicate equilibrium of the church-state relationship in China may be approaching a tipping point that could lead to severe crackdowns and violent clashes in the coming years. The situation in China today brings to mind the major shift in church-state relations that occurred in the Roman Empire during the fourth century CE, when the empire-wide "Great Persecution" of the church was ended by the Edict of Milan (313 CE), which granted freedom to Christians.

A Chronicle of the DCC Campaign and Christian Resistance

The "Three Rectifications, One Demolition" operation was officially launched in February 2013 as a three-year operation for landscape improvement throughout Zhejiang Province. The initial document announcing the campaign did not mention religion at all (Zhejiang Government 2013). By December 2013, however, illegal religious structures had become one of the major targets of the TROD operation. This development has been attributed by observers to an

October visit to Wenzhou by Xia Baolong, the Chinese Communist Party secretary of Zhejiang Province and the highest official in Zhejiang, who expressed displeasure when he saw the tall red cross atop the newly built Sanjiang Church. Located on a hillside near a highway, the church and its shiny cross were indeed visible from miles away. After seeing many crosses atop Christian churches during his inspection tours in the province, Xia asked, “Is this land under the cross or under the Communist Party?” (这是十字架的天下，还是共产党的天下？)¹ This rhetorical question divulges the political motive for subjugating Christianity through this campaign and other actions. Following the inspection tour in Wenzhou, the campaign to demolish rooftop crosses was quietly folded into the broader TROD operation. The concealed aims of the campaign, though repeatedly denied by party-state officials and official media, were inscribed in an internal document of the Zhejiang provincial government dated December 4, 2013, and titled “The Implementation Plan of the TROD in Dealing with Religious Illegal Structures.” This secret document, which was partially leaked in social media circles and eventually exposed by the *New York Times*,² unequivocally states that the campaign aimed to regulate “excessive religious sites” and “overly popular” religious activities, primarily targeting Christian churches and activities as well as folk religious structures: “The priority is to remove crosses at religious activity sites on both sides of expressways, national highways and provincial highways Over time and in batches, bring down the crosses from the rooftops to the façade of the buildings” (Zhejiang Government 2013).

Local governments subsequently developed their own plans to follow the provincial order regarding certain types of religious structures. The Shamen Township 沙门镇 government, for example, published its implementation plan on the Yuhuan County 玉环县 government website on December 18, 2013 (Shamen Government 2014). The plan listed seven types of architectural structures to be demolished, beginning with religious venues of unregistered “Christian gathering points,” which is the official way of referring to house churches. The second category targeted structural features that caused legally registered religious venues to exceed their approved dimensions; this provision also included rooftop crosses that increased the height of a church beyond what the building permit specified. The other five types included “small shrines and small temples” (*xiao miao xiao an* 小庙小庵) associated with folk religions. The list did not mention Buddhist, Daoist, or Islamic venues, despite the fact that Zhejiang has large numbers of these sites as well.

1 This expression has been widely circulated in Zhejiang, as we learned from many interviews with Christians and non-Christians. It is also mentioned in news reports, such as Johnson 2014.

2 The *New York Times*, after examining the full document, published some key parts of the Chinese text. See New York Times 2014a.

Beginning on January 1, 2014, many Christian churches were served with notifications to remove or reduce the height of their rooftop crosses, which were followed by forceful attempts at removal by demolition squads. On February 27, the cross on the spire of the church in Huanghu Township 黄湖镇 in Hangzhou 杭州市 was demolished, making it the first reported cross removal. But demolition squads met with Christian resistance at the churches wherever they went, and many demolition attempts were unsuccessful. A month later, Zhejiang authorities held a province-wide teleconference, mobilizing party-state officials to aggressively implement the DCC campaign by demolishing all crosses within about fifteen days. The DCC campaign quickly swept through the province. To show their determination in this campaign, the party-state demolished Sanjiang Church. Following weeks of contention, the magnificent Gothic structure was razed on April 28, 2014. Images of the collapsing church appeared in media outlets around the world and signified the breakdown of the mutual accommodation policy that had been in place for about three decades (Hao and Liu 2018).

Around the time of the Sanjiang Church demolition, the Zhejiang Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee and Christian Council, under the pressure of Zhejiang authorities, published appeals to Christians to understand and support the TROD operation. However, many Christian leaders in Wenzhou prefecture issued public statements denouncing the DCC campaign, and some even declared their withdrawal from the Three-Self Patriotic Movement committees (Ying 2018). In addition, two vice presidents of the Nanjing Seminary, which is based in Jiangsu Province and under the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council (and thus outside the jurisdiction of Zhejiang), also released statements urging the Zhejiang authorities to be careful about demolishing crosses (Chen 2014; Wang 2014). To combat negative public opinion and to justify the campaign, the *Zhejiang Daily* published a series of commentaries and editorials that were affirmed by authorities in Beijing as well as in Zhejiang, implying the endorsement of China's top-level national leadership (e.g., *Zhejiang Daily* 2014). Indeed, on May 6, 2014, the central government released the first "State Security Research Report," expressing concern for the threat posed by religion to socialism and warning of "hostile western forces" who use Christianity to infiltrate China (Liu 2014).

Encouraged by the media affirmation and endorsement from higher authorities, on July 9, 2014, Zhejiang party boss Xia Baolong issued a call to carry on the TROD to the end (将“三改一拆”进行到底), eerily echoing Chairman Mao's call to carry on the revolution to the end (将革命进行到底) (Zhejiang News 2014). On several occasions, resistant Christians clashed with demolition squads, resulting in severe injuries. Christians also held protest

rallies at government compounds. In late July 2014, Pastor Huang Yizi 黄益梓 of Pingyang County 平阳县 was arrested for “gathering masses to assault state organs” (New York Times 2014b). Immediately, more than a dozen lawyers descended from Beijing and Shanghai to defend the injured or detained Christians. Facing litigation challenges from these Christians and their lawyers, Zhejiang authorities mobilized researchers at the Zhejiang Academy of Social Sciences to come up with better legal justifications for the DCC campaign within the TROD operation.

However, the Christian legal challenges became stronger and stronger. For example, the Pingyang Detention Center at first refused to allow Pastor Huang Yizi to meet with his lawyer Zhang Kai. Zhang, an internationally renowned rights defender, held a sit-in protest in front of the gate of the Pingyang Detention Center, holding placards asking the authorities to abide by the law and follow the proper procedures. This was reported by many international media outlets. The Pingyang Detention Center begrudgingly gave in. Soon a photo of Pastor Huang in a yellow prisoner jacket sitting behind bars was widely circulated in social media and newspaper reports around the world, along with his spirited declaration of his determination to fight for the cross. Wishing to get rid of Zhang Kai, local authorities pressured Pastor Huang’s wife to dismiss the lawyer, promising to release her husband if she cooperated. However, the authorities did not fulfill their part of the bargain. After a few months, Huang’s wife rehired Zhang Kai to defend Pastor Huang during his court trial. On March 24, 2015, Pastor Huang was sentenced to a one-year prison term (Zhang 2015). Considered an injustice by the media, this sentence actually represented a victory for the defense because similar cases often resulted in much longer prison terms. Thereafter, many Christians in Pingyang and the surrounding counties hoped for an effective legal defense of their rights, and about one hundred churches hired Zhang Kai and others as legal counsel. Zhang and other lawyers also held teach-ins at churches to inform Christians about their legal rights and the legal procedures available for them to defend their churches. The key point was that there was no legal basis for removing the crosses from the rooftops of their churches. While it was indeed true that many churches had not secured all the necessary permits and their buildings exceeded the approved size, government agencies did not follow proper administrative procedures in dealing with the affected churches. In fact, the lack of proper approval was often due to administrative inaction, procrastination, and the protraction of cumbersome procedures by government bureaucracy (Xiao 2017). Therefore, according to the existing laws and regulations, the churches had the right to file administrative appeals and lawsuits against the agencies responsible for the damage of their property. Facing mounting legal challenges, the DCC campaign slowed, and was even temporarily suspended in late 2014 and early 2015.

To counter the legal challenges of resistant Christians and their lawyers, the Zhejiang government rushed to release a new regulation for religious buildings, a draft of which was published on May 5, 2015, for public comment (Zhejiang Provincial Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission 2015). The regulation stipulated that Protestant and Catholic churches could not install a cross on the rooftop of a church. They could, however, put a cross on the façade, but its height could not exceed one-tenth of the height of the façade, and its color had to blend in with the façade and the surrounding environment. Apparently, this was a post hoc effort to justify the government campaign, since most of the existing churches did not meet these requirements. Reverend Gu Yue, the senior pastor of Chongyi Church in Hangzhou and the president of Zhejiang Christian Council, one of the most respected Christian leaders in the officially sanctioned church association in Zhejiang Province, openly criticized the regulation for its unreasonable stipulations (Hangzhou Chongyi Church 2015). Criticisms and concerns poured in from Christian leaders, scholars, and others both within and beyond Zhejiang Province, but Zhejiang authorities adopted the hasty regulations without revision on July 10, 2015. In mid-August, several churches in Wenzhou, under the counsel of Zhang Kai, responded by filing an application for information disclosure regarding the process and the basis of the new regulation. They threatened to sue the government if no response was given within fifteen days, as stipulated in formally established legal procedures.

At the juncture of heightened contentions in Zhejiang, Xi Jinping, the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and top leader of the central government, made a high-profile visit to Zhoushan 舟山 and Hangzhou in Zhejiang on May 25–27, 2015 (People's Daily 2015). Upon hearing Xia Baolong's reports of the TROD operation and other works, Xi Jinping expressed affirmation for what had been done and encouraged even bolder measures.³ Thereafter, provincial leaders launched new waves of the DCC campaign.

In response, Christian resistance also became bolder. On July 5, 2015, the Zhejiang Catholic Patriotic Association and Church Affairs Committee (2015) released an open appeal to the Zhejiang Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission, demanding an immediate halt to the "evil action" (恶行) of demolishing church crosses. It claimed that the DCC campaign had violated the party-state religious policy, damaged the harmonious society, generated hatred,

3 According to the official news reports, Xi Jinping said to Xia Baolong, "干在实处永无止境，走在前列要谋新篇", which is a poetic comment that may be roughly translated as "There is no limit for action in a place of real concern, seek a new chapter at the forefront." This expression was used in the title of several news reports, such as People's Daily 2015.

and rendered the patriotic association a “broken bridge” (断桥) between the party-state and the churches. On July 10, the Zhejiang Christian Council also published an open letter to the Zhejiang Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission, pointing out that the demolition of Christian crosses under the guise of the TROD operation had affected more than 1,200 churches, including churches that had all the necessary approval certificates; the demolitions had hurt the feelings of the more than two million Christians in Zhejiang Province and rendered the bridging function of their council defunct (Zhejiang Christian Council 2015). The open letter also demanded an immediate halt of this “absurd action” (谬行). On July 22, several Protestant pastoral districts in Pingyang County made public statements, inviting people around China and beyond to come to their churches to witness the demolition. On July 24, the Catholic bishop of Wenzhou led all the priests in the diocese in a demonstration in front of the Wenzhou government compound. On July 28, the Catholic clergy of Wenzhou sent an open letter of appeal to all Chinese people and all Christians, titled “Shout out! Do not be silent anymore!” (呐喊吧！不要再沉默了！) (Wenzhou Pastors 2015).

The public resistance of Christians became increasingly difficult to handle using regular administrative or legal means. Therefore, the Zhejiang authorities resorted to extraordinary measures. On August 25, 2015, lawyer Zhang Kai and his assistants were arrested and placed in secret detention, a severe punishment reserved for the most dangerous political enemies of the party-state. In late August and early September, more than a dozen Christian pastors, elders, and other leaders were also placed in secret detention. Thereafter, the DCC campaign forcefully continued, demolishing even more crosses (see Figure 1). Furthermore, in early 2016, Pastor Gu Yuese was stripped of his positions, arrested, and charged. On February 6, 2016, pastors Bao Guohua and his wife Xing Wenxiang of Jinhua City, who were arrested on July 26, 2015 for protesting the DCC campaign, were sentenced to fourteen and twelve years in prison respectively (BBC Chinese 2016).

However, because Zhejiang’s experiment had generated too many negative reactions within and beyond the province, its approach was not subsequently affirmed by the central authorities. On April 22–23, 2016, the National Conference of Religious Affairs Work was held in Beijing. This conference, which was expected to set the direction and guidelines of religious policy under the Xi Jinping regime, did not acknowledge the DCC campaign in Zhejiang. Instead, four other provinces were highlighted as good models for handling religious affairs. About two weeks before the conference, the DCC campaign was quietly halted, with no announcement of its ending or any celebration of its accomplishments. About a year later, on April 27, 2017, Xia Baolong was removed from his

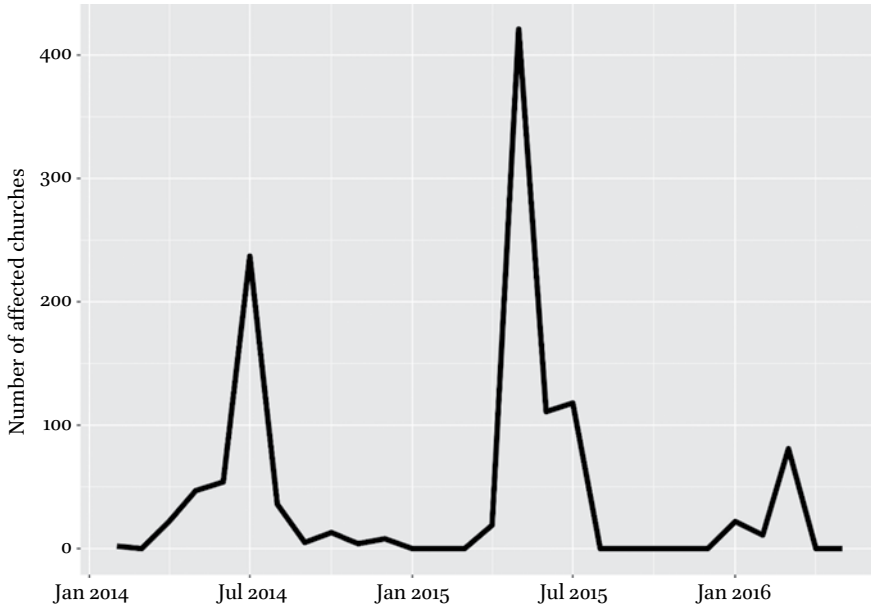


FIGURE 1 *The number of churches in Zhejiang Province affected by the campaign to demolish church crosses (February 2014–April 2016), by month.*

position in Zhejiang and summoned to Beijing, where he was given a sinecure at the Environment Committee of the National People's Congress.

Although the official conclusion of the DCC campaign was not announced by the Chinese authorities, its failure is evident. The chronicle of events shows that the DCC campaign missed several self-imposed deadlines. First, on March 28, 2014, at a teleconference of all provincial officials, Xia Baolong demanded the removal of all crosses within about fifteen days (Wanwei Blog 2014). That did not happen due to strong resistance at the Sanjiang Church and in other areas. Second, the secret document exposed by the *New York Times* set the goal of removing all rooftop crosses by the end of 2014. This official goal was confirmed by the published implementation plan of Shamen Town. However, the DCC campaign continued throughout 2015 and well into early 2016. Third, in August 2015, Christians in Wenzhou reported that they had seen a circular that commanded the local government to complete the demolition of all crosses by the end of September 2015. Fourth, in March 2016, a new goal was set to demolish all crosses by the end of April 2016. But by the end of the campaign around mid-April 2016, the total number of churches that had lost their rooftop crosses was no more than 1,700. This number accounts for only about one-third to a quarter of all existing churches in Zhejiang Province, as explained below.

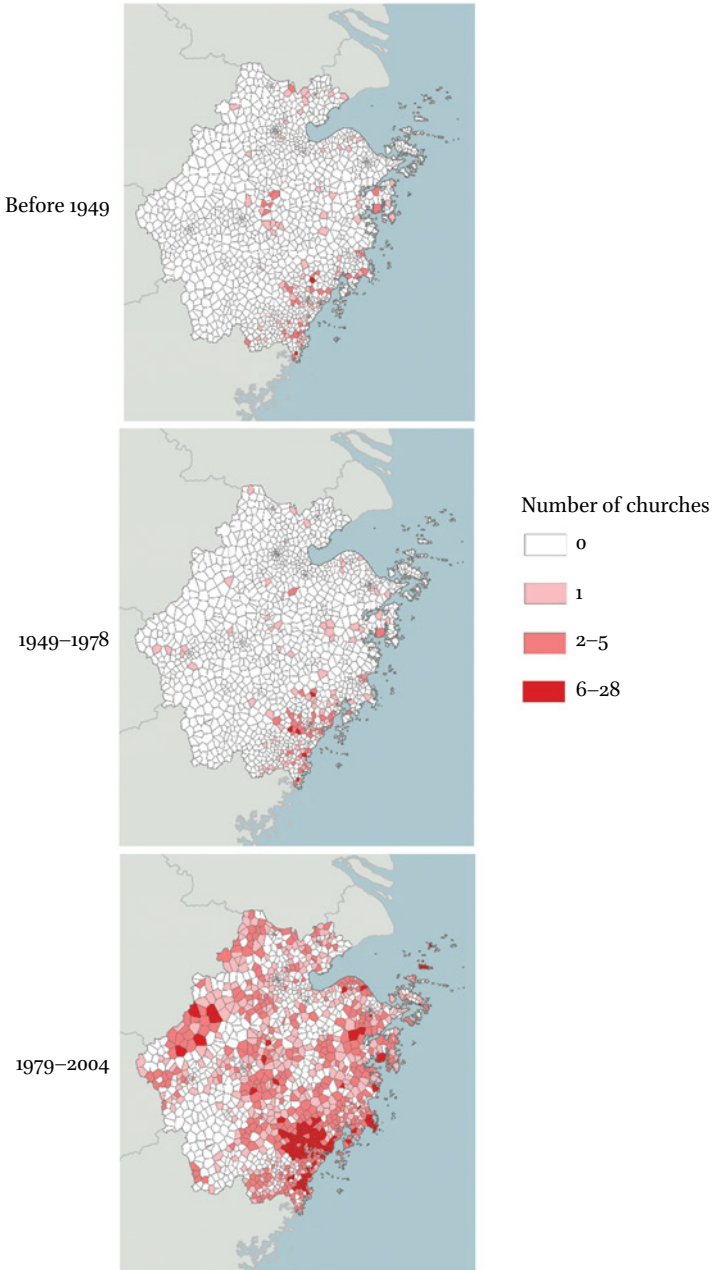
The Spatial Distribution of Christian Churches and the Demolished Crosses

In 2004, the National Census Bureau of China conducted an economic census that included religious organizations as economic units. Data publicly available through the China Data Center at the University of Michigan contain information about the religious sites of China's five officially sanctioned religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam.⁴ For each religious site, the census recorded its name, address, year of establishment, contact information, and some economic characteristics, enabling us to quantitatively describe and analyze the spatial and temporal patterns of religious sites. Using physical addresses, we obtained the geographical coordinates (latitude and longitude) of each religious site. Then we aggregated the number of religious sites at the county level. We further approximated township polygons using the centroids of the town seats' point data. This enabled us to identify patterns of geographical distribution of religious sites at the township level.

Map 1 shows that prior to 1949 most townships in Zhejiang Province did not have a Christian church, and by 1979 only a few new churches had been established. Between 1979 and 2004, however, there was a dramatic increase in the number of churches across Zhejiang except in the southwestern region. Wenzhou prefecture stands out as the region with the largest number and most widespread distribution of Christian churches. Other areas with relatively high concentrations include coastal towns in the neighboring Taizhou and Ningbo prefectures, as well as some of the islands of Zhoushan, the inland county of Dongyang in Jinhua, and the western towns surrounding Lake Qiandao 千岛湖 in Hangzhou prefecture.

Based on interviews and information from various sources, we know that many more churches have been established since 2004. Indeed, there was a frenzy of church building construction, with newer churches becoming taller, larger, and grander. Remarkably, almost all of the newly built churches placed on their spires a tall red Roman cross—a short horizontal beam on a longer upright post. The conspicuous red crosses dotting the skylines had indeed become ubiquitous throughout Zhejiang. We have asked various Christians why they chose to have a red-colored cross atop the church. The most common

4 The CES 2004 only includes legally registered religious sites, which Yang's (2012) triple market theory describes as operating in the "red market" with formal legal status. It did not collect information about sites belonging to "black market" or "gray market" religious groups, which have an illegal or ambiguous legal status.



MAP 1 *The development of Christian churches in Zhejiang Province at the township level, pre-1949-2004.*

DATA SOURCE: CHINESE ECONOMIC CENSUS 2004 © CRCS.

answer has been that red signifies the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for human salvation, and of the martyrs who shed their blood for the faith and evangelism.

In fact, red Roman crosses have become common in other provinces as well. In an article titled “The Cross Faces the Loudspeakers: A Village Church Perseveres under State Power,” Jianbo Huang and Fenggang Yang (2005) describe the confrontations surrounding such a cross atop a village church in Gansu Province in northwestern China. This is also the most common shape and color of the crosses in a photo exhibition depicting one hundred village churches in Central China (Center on Religion and Chinese Society 2010; Purdue University 2010).

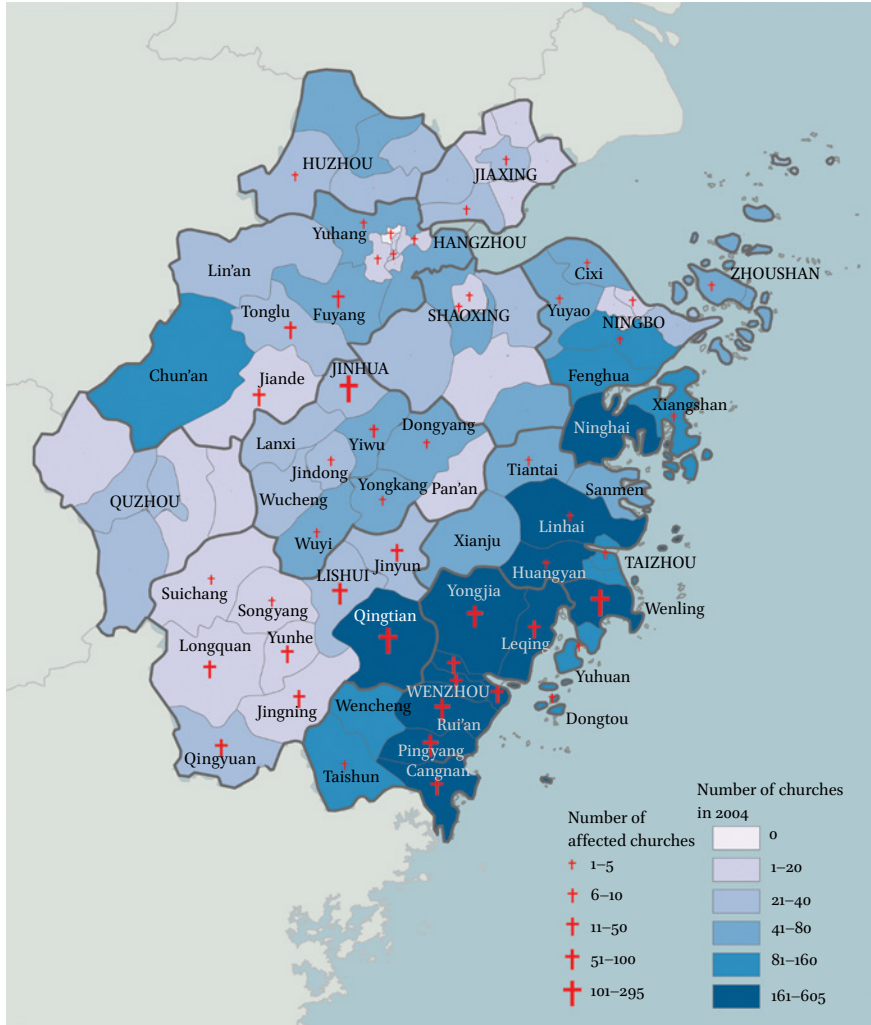
In addition to the theological symbolism explained above, the sturdy cross standing silently yet conspicuously also signifies quiet resistance to suppression. The official religious policy and regulations explicitly prohibit evangelism outside religious premises, and censorship of the press muffles reporting on Christian activities (MacInnis 1989; Yang 2012). Christians in China, however, have strong evangelistic tendencies (Vala 2017; Ma and Li 2018). Therefore, as a response to the suppression of their public presence in society, the tall crosses atop their churches appear to be an alternative way to represent Christian witness in a country under the dominance of an atheist party. Indeed, Xia Baolong’s rhetorical question, “Is this land under the cross, or under the Communist Party?” shows that the perception of the symbolic significance of the cross was on target. However, the political experiment undertaken to solve the problem ended in failure.

We believe that had the suppression of Christianity stopped in China, the red and tall crosses on church spires would not be as common as they are today. In fact, in other Chinese societies sharing similar traditional and modern cultures, such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, or Chinese diasporas, a tall red cross is not commonly placed atop Christian churches. In other words, the conspicuous red crosses on top of churches are a phenomenon peculiar to China today. The crosses are painted red, the color of blood and passionate commitment. But red is also the color of the Chinese Communist Party flag, the national flag, and the ties worn by the “young pioneers” 少先队员, a Communist mass organization for school children. Whereas red in a flag signifies revolutionary fervor, red on a cross signifies a willingness to sacrifice oneself in defense of the faith. The former is active, the latter is defensive, but both signify passionate commitment. It is this passionate commitment of Christians to their faith that poses a real challenge to a party-state that demands uncompromised loyalty.

The Zhejiang authorities have not released information on the churches affected by the DCC campaign; however, we fortuitously received a catalogue

of cross removals compiled by Reverend Zheng Leguo 郑乐国, a Wenzhou native now serving as a Christian minister in the United States. Using social media sources and his wide-reaching network of connections among Christians in Zhejiang, Zheng identified more than 1,200 of the churches affected by the DCC campaign. He informed us that this list was not complete, because it had become increasingly dangerous for people in Zhejiang to share information about cross demolitions on social media or over the telephone. As a matter of fact, some individuals were detained by police for posting such information on social media. Reverend Zheng's family members in Wenzhou were also visited by the police in attempts to pressure him to stop gathering and releasing information about the cross demolitions. Upon careful examination, we find Zheng's list to be the most comprehensive one available. We have verified the addresses of about one-quarter of the affected churches, and for those without detailed street addresses, we have aggregated them at the county level. Map 2 overlays the number of affected churches on the number of churches recorded in the 2004 census. It shows that the impact of the cross-removal campaign was most pronounced in the prefectures of Hangzhou, Jinhua, Lishui, Taizhou, and Wenzhou. The remaining prefectures had very few if any cross-removals.

A noticeable characteristic in Map 2 is that the number of affected churches does not necessarily correlate to the number of churches that existed in 2004. Wenzhou, southeastern Taizhou, northeastern Lishui, northern Jinhua, and the counties south of Hangzhou City have both high concentrations of churches and large numbers of cross removals, but not all areas with numerous churches were significantly impacted by the campaign. The Lake Qiandao area of western Hangzhou, southern Ningbo, northern Taizhou, southern Shaoxing, southern Jinhua, and western Huzhou all have high concentrations of churches recorded in the 2004 census but fewer reported cross removals. It appears that the DCC campaign was not evenly carried out everywhere. Through interviews we have learned that many local officials were reluctant to tear down crosses because of pressures from Christian family members and friends. Local officials preferred to negotiate with local churches rather than carry out the demolition orders. For example, the Yongjia County government, in anticipation of Xia Baolong's inspection visit, first negotiated with Sanjiang Church about how to avoid conflict, and then explored alternatives to a total teardown of the church (Hao and Liu 2018). Without the strict order from the provincial government, Sanjiang Church might not have been completely demolished. In the early days of the DCC campaign, some local governments seem merely to have taken sluggish action. At the teleconference on March 28, 2014, as mentioned above, Xia Baolong urged officials to show determination and act swiftly. Only



MAP 2 Churches in Zhejiang Province affected by the campaign to demolish church crosses in 2014–2016, and the number of churches in 2004.
 DATA SOURCE: REVEREND ZHENG LEGUO AND CHINESE ECONOMIC CENSUS 2004 © CRCS.

after repeated pressure from provincial authorities did more and more local officials begin pushing the campaign forward. Meanwhile, the provincial authorities also increased incentives for aggressively carrying out campaign orders. For example, Sheng Qiuping 盛秋平 was the Yongjia County 永嘉 CCP secretary when Sanjiang Church was demolished on April 28, 2014. In June 2014 he was promoted to become the mayor of Yiwu City 义乌市, where there were

subsequently high numbers of cross demolitions. In December 2015, Sheng received another promotion and became the CCP secretary of Yiwu City.⁵

Conclusion

In recent years, the rapid growth of Christianity has become a major concern of the Chinese Communist party-state. For example, Zhu Weiqun, the former deputy minister of the CCP United Front Work Department and current chair of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC), publicly acknowledged the "overheated" growth of religious venues (Zhu 2013). The control apparatuses of the party-state have tried to keep Christians and Christian organizations at bay. In such a political climate, some ambitious officials may try to curry favor by conducting experiments to alleviate the frustration expressed by top officials of the central authorities. The DCC campaign wrapped in the TROD operation in Zhejiang can be considered such an experiment. However, it was an audacious and hasty campaign that seriously underestimated Christian resistance. This is perhaps due to the high visibility of Christian businesspeople in Zhejiang, who tend to show pragmatic compromises in their economic and political dealings (Cao 2010). During the DCC campaign, Christian businesspeople seemed to be effectively silenced by threats to audit their companies tax records or to investigate their economic activities. However, many pastors and evangelists had little to lose economically but much to gain in the faith community by leading the defense of the church and the cross (Zhu 2017). Many Christians rose up to guard the cross with their bodies during confrontations with demolition squads.

Moreover, to counter the resistance and legal challenges from Christians, Zhejiang authorities rushed to promulgate new rules and justifications for the DCC, but these measures appeared so absurd that criticism poured in not only from prominent Christian leaders in Zhejiang and beyond, but also from non-Christian scholars, intellectuals, and even party-state officials from other

5 In addition, former CCP secretary of Wenzhou City, Chen Yixin 陈一新, went to Beijing in December 2015 to become the deputy director of the CCP Central Leadership Group of All Inclusive and Deepening Reforms 中共中央全面深化改革领导小组办公室专职副主任. Gong Zheng 龚正 was the CCP secretary of Hangzhou City and was promoted to CCP vice secretary of Shandong Province in August 2015. While we have had no way to confirm that these promotions were a reward for tearing down church crosses, it seems likely that the cross-removal campaign played a role in their advancement within the party-state system. See UCAN News 2014.

provinces. Given its history of hasty decisions, unreasonable stipulations, and executive incapability, the failed campaign damaged the image of the Zhejiang authorities.

Comparing the number of cross removals with the goal set by the initial plan in the secret document indicates that the DCC campaign was a failure. More importantly, the campaign impaired the officially sanctioned Christian organizations. For several decades, the party-state has painstakingly maneuvered to portray these official associations as bridges between religious believers and the party-state. However, the leaders of these associations declared that the bridges were broken by the “absurd” or “evil” campaign. Rebuilding confidence in these associations among believers will be difficult, if indeed it is possible at all. Furthermore, the extraordinary measures taken against the most prominent resisters were serious blows to the party’s institution-building effort. In this regard, the decision to drop the unwarranted charges against Pastor Gu Yuese may be interpreted as a calculated step toward restoring people’s confidence in the party-state authorities and the officially sanctioned Christian Council. However, Pastors Bao and Xing of Jinhua are still serving their long prison terms, and lawyer Zhang Kai and a few others continue to “wait for the pending trial.” The DCC campaign is not over yet.

Had the DCC campaign been successful in Zhejiang, it could possibly have been extended to other provinces. However, given its record of failures, it is unlikely that other provinces will follow suit. On the other hand, however, as long as Christianity is perceived as a political threat by the Communist party-state, other provincial or local officials may be incentivized to experiment with other measures aimed at suppressing Christianity.

Indeed, the overall political climate in recent years increases the likelihood of this kind of experimental campaign against Christianity. The climate includes the resurgence of militant atheism and rising nationalism, which is used by the current regime to maintain power. In the last several years, various universities and schools have forbidden students to celebrate Christmas. In February 2018, the new and more restrictive regulations on religious affairs took effect.

Our spatial analysis demonstrates that some areas with high concentrations of churches reported large numbers of cross removals while others reported very few. With China’s political context in view, it appears that the provincial order to remove crosses from churches was implemented variably at the local level. Rather than being uniformly enforced throughout the province, campaign orders met with different levels of compliance among local officials, not all of whom were aligned with the campaign’s goals. This reality has broader implications. Even if greater suppressions become a national policy, we can

expect varied implementation in different provinces and regions. As in the case of the “Great Persecution” (303–313 CE) of Christian believers in the Roman Empire, uniform implementation of a restrictive policy is not possible across such a vast state. The persecution of fourth-century Christians ended with the Edict of Milan (313 CE). If the number of Christians continues to increase in China as it has over the last four decades, a Milan-like moment of dramatic change may not be far away.

References

- BBC Chinese. 2016. “Priest Couple Bao Guohua and Xing Wenxiang Are Convicted with Lengthy Sentences” 浙江教案：包国华、刑文香牧师夫妻遭重判. http://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/china/2016/02/160226_china_church_trial (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Cao, Nanlai. 2010. *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Center on Religion and Chinese Society. 2010. “Strangers No More: Village Churches on the Good Earth of the Sacred Land.” <https://www.purdue.edu/crcs/events/global-china-forum/global-china-forum-2010/photo-exhibition/>.
- Chen, Yilu 陈逸鲁. 2014. “Some Thoughts from Modern Management Science on the Demolition of the Sanjiang Cross” 从现代管理学的角度思考强拆三江十字架事件. Pushi Institute for Social Science. May 1. <http://www.pacilution.com/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=4973> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Hangzhou Chongyi Church. 2015. “Churches in Hangzhou Respond to ‘The Regulation of Religious Buildings in Zhejiang Province’: The Administrative Department Involved Should Not Interfere in Religious Affairs” 杭州教会反馈《浙江省宗教建筑规范》：主管部门不宜涉及宗教内部事务. <http://www.gospeltimes.cn/index.php/portal/article/index/id/28664> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Hao, Zhidong, and Yan Liu. 2018. “Mutual Accommodation in the Church-State Relationship in China? A Case Study of the Sanjiang Church Demolition in Zhejiang.” *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 5 (1): 26–42.
- Huang, Jianbo, and Fenggang Yang. 2005. “The Cross Faces the Loudspeakers: A Village Church Perseveres Under State Power.” In *State, Market, and Religions in Chinese Societies*, edited by Fenggang Yang and Joseph B. Tamney, 41–62. Leiden: Brill. doi 10.1163/243955-04102002b.
- Hunter, Alan, and Kim-Kwong Chan. 1993. *Protestantism in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, Ian. 2014. “Church-State Clash in China Coalesces Around a Toppled Spire.” *New York Times*, May 30. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/world/asia/church>

- state-clash-in-china-coalesces-around-a-toppled-spire.html (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Liu, Hui 刘慧. 2014. "Annual Report on China's National Security Studies 2014" 中国国家安全研究报告 2014. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.
- MacInnis, Donald E. 1989. *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- McLeister, Mark. 2018. "Chinese Protestant Reactions to the Zhejiang 'Three Rectifications, One Demolition' Campaign." *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 5 (1): 76–100.
- New York Times. 2014a. "The 2013 Implementation Plan of the TROD Involving Illegal Religious Buildings" '三改一拆' 涉及宗教违法建筑处置工作实施方案 2013. <https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20140530/cc30document/> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- New York Times. 2014b. "More Churches Lose Their Crosses Despite Protests" 不顾抗议，浙江基督教堂再拆十字架. <https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20140815/c15church/> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- O'Brien, Kevin J., ed. 2008. *Popular Protest in China*. Harvard Contemporary China Series 15. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- People's Daily. 2015. "There Is No End to Work: Taking the Lead and Creating a New Environment" 干在实处永无止境，走在前列要谋新篇. May 28. <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n/2015/0528/c117092-27067969.html> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Perry, Elizabeth J. 2001. "Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Popular Protest in Modern China." *Critical Asian Studies* 33 (2): 163–180.
- Purdue University. 2010. "Purdue Galleries begins a new season of exhibitions." Purdue University News Service. August 19. <http://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/events/2010/100819AR-MartinGalleries.html> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Shamen Government. 2014. "The Implementation Plan of Regulating the Illegal Religious Buildings in Shamen Township" 沙门镇宗教和民间信仰活动场所违法建筑专项整治工作实施方案. <http://www.pacilution.com/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=4877> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- UCAN News. 2014. "Zhejiang Christians Suspect Officials' Promotions or Demotions Related to Three Rectifications and One Demolition" 浙江基督徒怀疑官员升迁和追责与三改一拆有关. June 27. <http://china.ucanews.com/2014/06/27/> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Vala, Carsten T. 2017. *The Politics of Protestant Churches and the Party-State in China: God above Party?* New York: Routledge.
- Wang, Aiming 王艾明. 2014. "The Amount and Degree of Demolition of Illegal Structures in Zhejiang: The Cross and the State Rationality" 浙江拆违的量与度——十字架与国家理性. *Gospel Times*, June 29. <http://m.gospeltimes.cn/news/23734> (accessed January 10, 2018).

- Wanwei Blog. 2014. "Why does Secretary Xia Baolong give the 'cross' a hard time?" 夏宝龙书记为什么要跟十字架过不去. April 13. <http://blog.creaders.net/u/2366/201404/178784.html> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Wenzhou Pastors. 2015. "An Open Letter: Shout Out! Do Not Be Silent Anymore!" 一封呼吁信：呐喊吧！不要再沉默了！. July 28. http://www.chinaaid.net/2015/07/blog-post_61.html (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Xiao, Yunze. 2017. "Belief Patterns and Land Rules: A Case Study of Christianity Based on Land-Control Act [*sic*] in Province A." *Logos & Pneuma Chinese Journal of Theology* 46 (2): 375–410.
- Yang, Fenggang. 2012. *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ying, Fuk-tsang. 2018. "The Politics of Cross Demolition: A Religio-Political Analysis of the 'Three Rectifications and One Demolition' Campaign in Zhejiang Province." *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 5 (1): 43–75.
- Zhang, Peihong 张培鸿. 2015. "The Affidavit from Pastor Yizi Huang in Defense of Charges of Disturbing Social Order" 黄益梓牧师涉嫌聚众扰乱社会秩序案辩护词. Website of the Pu Shi Institute for Social Science. <http://www.pacilution.com/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=5685> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Zhejiang Catholic Patriotic Association and Church Affairs Committee. 2015. "Zhejiang Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) Strongly Requested the Authorities to Stop Cross Demolition Immediately" 浙江省天主教“两会”强烈要求立即停止拆除十字架. <http://msguancha.com/a/lanmu4/2015/0707/12750.html> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Zhejiang Christian Council. 2015. "An Open Letter of the Zhejiang Christian Council to Zhejiang Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission to Stop Cross Demolition" 浙江基督教协会呼吁 停止强拆教堂十字架. <http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/Xinwen/13-07112015163733.html> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Zhejiang Daily. 2014. "Yongjia County of Wenzhou Demolished the Sanjiang Illegal Religious Building" 浙江永嘉依法拆除三江违法宗教建筑. April 29. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0429/c83084-24955806.html> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Zhejiang Government. 2013. "The Announcement of the Three Year Plan of the 'Three Rectification, One Demolition' throughout Zhejiang Province" 浙江省人民政府关于在全省开展‘三改一拆’三年行动的通知. http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2013/3/13/art_13012_77021.html (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Zhejiang News. 2014. "Carry the Three Rectification and One Demolition through to the End" 将三改一拆进行到底. <http://zjnews.zjol.com.cn/system/2014/07/08/020129012.shtml> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- Zhejiang Provincial Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission. 2015. "The Draft of Regulation of Religious Buildings in Zhejiang Province" 浙江宗教建筑规范征求意见. <https://zj.zjol.com.cn/news/96883.html> (accessed January 10, 2018).

- Zhu, Jianzhong. 2017. "Religious Regulation and Churches Responses—A Case Study on the Anti-demolition Action of Christianity in Wenzhou." Paper presented at the international conference "Changing Religious Landscape in Contemporary East Asia," July 11–13, 2017, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong.
- Zhu, Weiqun 朱维群. 2013. "Study Religious Policy, Do Religious Work Well" 学习宗教政策，做好宗教工作. *China Ethnic News*, July 23. http://www.mzzjw.cn/zgmzb/html/2013-07/23/content_93185.htm (accessed January 10, 2018).