

## Article

# Religious Regulation and Churches' Responses—A Case Study on the Anti-Demolition Actions of Christians in Wenzhou

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Received: 15 September 2018; Accepted: 31 October 2018; Published: 5 November 2018



**Abstract:** This article focuses on the characteristics, causes, and patterns of the anti-demolition actions by churches in Wenzhou. Based on my six field studies from July 2014 to February 2016, I discovered that: (1) these actions are more explicit in Wenzhou churches due to their regional distinctiveness; (2) a wide range of differences can be observed among Wenzhou churches due to their doctrinal diversity; and (3) 'poor pastors' have taken the leadership roles in the anti-demolition activities instead of the 'boss Christians'. Considering the ongoing tension in the Chinese religious environment between central government planning and free market operation, the author points out that the pastoral district system in Wenzhou plays a very important role in anti-demolition and offers the 'cost-benefit' exchange theory to explain the pattern of the anti-demolition activities by Wenzhou churches.

**Keywords:** religious regulation; crosses removed; Wenzhou church

## 1. Introduction: Research Questions and Arguments

Since 2014, the cross demolitions in Zhejiang province have attracted international attention. However, people tend to look at these as an issue only in one city—Wenzhou. In fact, other cities in Zhejiang have had a higher rate of cross demolitions than Wenzhou.<sup>1</sup> There are two key reasons for this misconception. First, there are more church buildings in Wenzhou than in other cities;<sup>2</sup> second, Christians in Wenzhou are more passionate about fighting against these demolitions than those in other cities. Making matters more complicated, in the Wenzhou area each different religious group responds differently to the cross demolitions. Furthermore, even within the same church, there are competing views on how to best protect their crosses.

Why do Christians respond differently to these demolitions? My six field studies from July 2014 to February 2016 revealed that: (1) the actions of Wenzhou churches are more direct and contentious because of their regional distinctiveness; (2) many differences can be observed among Wenzhou churches due to their doctrinal diversity; and (3) 'poor preachers' have taken the leadership roles in the anti-demolition activities instead of the wealthier 'boss Christians' because the former have received more theological education<sup>3</sup> and have far less to lose financially.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is based on my field work between 16 September 2015 and 7 February 2016.

<sup>2</sup> China's 2004 Economic Census Data with GIS Maps (Beijing: All China Market Research Co., LTD, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> This consists of two factors: situational theology understanding and belief in a doctrine of loyalty.

<sup>4</sup> Wenzhou Church preachers often call themselves 'poor preachers' due to their low income and modest wealth. In contrast, 'boss Christians' are wealthier members of the community, i.e., businesspeople, with significant business, financial, or real estate holdings.

Wenzhou is called the Jerusalem of China. Generally, the degree of religious freedom there was higher than other Chinese cities. However, during the Cross-Demolition Movement, Wenzhou Christianity has experienced much greater suppression than other cities. This shows that Christianity in mainland China is facing growing tension between macro-regulation by the government and the limited freedom of market-driven religion. On the one hand, these regulations show that the government continues to control the development of religions in China via administrative and political measures; on the other hand, religious groups are also striving for more freedom of expression in a society that is opening up gradually. Under such dynamics, how churches react to cross demolitions is driven not only by doctrinal teaching but also by utilitarian consideration and pragmatic decision-making. The author proposes that the theory of cost–benefit exchange is suitable for explaining the differential reactions by different churches and points out that the system of pastoral districts (牧区) in Wenzhou churches plays an important role in the anti-demolition movement.

## 2. The “Cross Demolition Movement” Emerges from the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” Campaign

### 2.1. Dealing with Illegal Constructions under the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” Policy

The “Cross Demolition Movement” emerged from the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” (三改一拆) Campaign in Zhejiang province. As early as December 2012, the Zhejiang Provincial Committee had decided to seriously study and implement the methods to modernize Zhejiang in the spirit of national initiatives. The “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” Campaign had already been proposed as a three-year action plan. The “three rectifications” refer to the old residential areas, the old factory districts, and the villages within a city’s limits, while “one demolition” refers to the demolition of illegal constructions.<sup>5</sup> The implementation of the campaign was envisioned in three stages. Stage One was strategy formulation and planning with concrete objectives (to be completed by March 2013). Stage Two was to put these measures into practice and fully enforce them (from April 2013 to the end of 2015). Stage Three was to end the campaign, assess what had been achieved, and consolidate these outcomes (to be completed by the first half of 2016).<sup>6</sup>

Before January 2013, an extended meeting for theoretical study was held and conducted by the provincial Department of Land and Resources of Zhejiang to make it clear that the main work for the whole year of 2013 was the concrete implementation of “Three Rectifications and One Demolition”.<sup>7</sup> Then, throughout the province, cities like Cixi (慈溪市), Longwan District of Wenzhou (温州市龙湾区), Quzhou (衢州市), and Huzhou (湖州市) drafted actions plan to follow the provincial government’s “three rectifications and one demolition” call. On February 21, the General Office of the People’s Government in the provincial government made an official announcement that the People’s Government in cities, counties (towns, districts) and all units directly under the provincial government were to launch the three-year action plan of the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” campaign.<sup>8</sup>

In May 2013, in regard to illegal structures owned by religious groups, the government issued an order that the Religious Affairs Department must inform the person-in-charge to tear down the illegal structure by him- or herself. If no action was taken within the time frame set by the Department, then the authority concerned was to take compulsory action to demolish the illegal structure according

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2012/12/14/art\\_5494\\_499916.html](http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2012/12/14/art_5494_499916.html), 2016/02/24.

<sup>6</sup> See: “the study and implement of the spirit of the 18th CPC people’s congress by Zhejiang provincial committee”, [http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2012/12/14/art\\_5494\\_499916.html](http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2012/12/14/art_5494_499916.html). 2016/02/24 download.

<sup>7</sup> Zhejiang Provincial “central office leading Party group in the fourth quarter of theoretical study (enlarged) meeting”, Zhejiang Provincial People’s Government, [http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2013/1/11/art\\_13101\\_554271.html](http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2013/1/11/art_13101_554271.html). 2016/02/24 download.

<sup>8</sup> Zhejiang Provincial People’s Government in the province to carry out the “three rectifications, one demolition” notice of action for three years”, Zhejiang Provincial People’s Government, [http://zfxgk.zj.gov.cn/xxgk/jcms\\_files/jcms1/web57/site/art/2013/3/14/art\\_5082\\_11041.html](http://zfxgk.zj.gov.cn/xxgk/jcms_files/jcms1/web57/site/art/2013/3/14/art_5082_11041.html). 2016/02/24 download.

to legal procedure and then make a public announcement.<sup>9</sup> On 4 December, a province-wide working committee was established on Handling Illegal Structures of Religious Buildings as part of carrying out the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition”. Then they made “The 2013 Implementation Plan of the trod Involving Illegal Religious Buildings” (*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).<sup>10</sup>

Two main points were highlighted.<sup>11</sup>

1. Objectives and principles: To correct the errors of “the over-rapid development, the oversized worship places and the overdone worship” of some local religious organizations . . . To carry out the specific rectification within a year, and to see results in the first six months and achieve full success within a year.
2. Main tasks: To solve the issue of oversized and/or flashing religious symbols such as crosses. To inspect all the religious symbols on rooftops, especially crosses, in the province and take action. Flashing will only be allowed during religious festivals. The most important job is to demolish crosses along national highways and provincial roads and remove illegal crosses from rooftops and building facades in stages.

Soon after the New Year in 2014, Zhejiang churches were consecutively informed and demanded to demolish or to rectify the position of the cross on the rooftop of the church premise. On 1 January, the Gouzhuang church (勾庄教会) in Liangzhu Town (良渚镇), Yuhang District (余杭区) was told to tear down the cross of the church. It was said that Provincial Secretary Xia Baolong (夏宝龙) went on an inspection tour of the town Zhoushan (舟山) on 8 January. As he passed Baiquan Church (白泉教堂), he remarked that the cross of the church was too eye-catching and too provocative. “Is this world under the rule of the cross or the Chinese Communist Party?” He demanded that the Religious Bureau concretely carry out the cross removal request. In fact, at 9:00 a.m. on 27 February, the cross of Huanghu Church (黄湖教会) located in Yuhang District (余杭区), Hangzhou was demolished by force. Thus began the cross demolitions, as a part of the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition”.

## 2.2. Sanjiang Incident: Demolition of Illegal Constructions or Illegal Demolition?

Cross demolition was met with strong resistance in Wenzhou when the Sanjiang Church was targeted, and the situation quickly escalated. Generally speaking, to people outside the church this seemed to be a matter of illegal construction, i.e., the building being much bigger than planned, and construction being built on agricultural land. In May 2014, during a delegation visit to the National Bureau of Religious Affairs, I asked Jiang, the Deputy Secretary, directly about the “Zhejiang Cross Demolition” who quickly attributed it to “the three rectifications and one demolition” policy against illegal constructions, saying that this was government’s policy, not that of the Bureau.<sup>12</sup> Even the webpage of the “Liang Hui” (the TSPM & CCC)<sup>13</sup> in Zhejiang Province posted that “The Sanjiang Church in Yongjia County, Wenzhou had been built at her own discretion without going through the conversion (from its original agricultural land) procedure, the land acquisition procedure, and construction planning approval procedure. In addition, her construction area and height far exceeded its original plan, and that is a serious legal offence”.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> [http://zfxgk.zj.gov.cn/xgk/jcms\\_files/jcms1/web57/site/art/2013/3/14/art\\_5082\\_11041.html](http://zfxgk.zj.gov.cn/xgk/jcms_files/jcms1/web57/site/art/2013/3/14/art_5082_11041.html), 2016/02/24.

<sup>10</sup> “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. *New York Times* (Chinese website), <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20140530/cc30document/>, 2016/02/24.

<sup>11</sup> This is from government documents, the full texts of which I was briefly given access to in Wenzhou. This quotation of the “two points” is actually from *New York Times* (Chinese website). <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20140530/cc30document/>, 2016/02/24.

<sup>12</sup> Author’s record of the interview at the RAB, 2014/05/12.

<sup>13</sup> Also called the *Liang Hui* (“two councils”), the TSPM & CCC is the government-sanctioned leadership body of all legal Protestant churches in the PRC.

<sup>14</sup> Zhejiang TSPM & CCC: “Announcement on the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” in Zhejiang Province and Concerning the Disposal of Religious and Illegal Buildings”, [http://www.zjchurch.com/11901-535/23514\\_23649.html](http://www.zjchurch.com/11901-535/23514_23649.html) 2016/02/24.

However, according to local church members, the church had been told by the local government in August 2013 to remove the cross, which had stood out in a too-prominent way just before the provincial leadership, including the provincial party secretary Mr. Xia Baolong (夏宝龙) was about to take an inspection tour, but the church refused.<sup>15</sup> As November, the month of inspection, approached, the government raised the matter again with a much stronger warning. Opinion began to be divided within the Sanjiang congregation and finally the Jiangbei pastoral district (江北牧区) which was in charge of 40 churches including Sanjiang church took over the matter.<sup>16</sup> The decision was to put up banners such as “Glorify God, Benefit Men”, “Love Our Country, Love Our Religion”, and “Strong Opposition to Religious Discrimination”. Between 60 and 70 church members were arranged to occupy the outdoor stairway in front of the church building and sing hymns and pray to God. The sit-in protest and the display of large banners were reported to the provincial government by the “610 Office”.<sup>17</sup> With the provincial secretary’s signature (a direct order), a thorough investigation of Sanjiang’s “illegal construction” began.

In March 2014, the government increased the pressure in demanding the cross be removed but the church once again refused. At that point, the congregation began to meet every day as information was spread through public internet platforms, and Christians from other churches across the pastoral district quickly joined the anti-demolition campaign. As the demolition deadline, April 2, was drawing near, approximately five thousand believers gathered together at the church. The demolition deadline was put off to April 22, when thousands of believers still gathered, and some church leaders were arrested. On April 25, the church committee was told by the authorities that “if you do not evacuate, the Sanjiang Incident will be regarded as an assault on the government, a social riot, and the whole Jiangbei pastoral district (江北牧区) will be suppressed” (Lin 2015).<sup>18</sup> At 5:00 a.m. on April 28, over 1000 armed police and security guards sealed off adjacent roadways, shut down all communication networks and demolished everything by force. The demolition action went all the way until 8:35 p.m. The whole church building was torn down.

The Sanjiang Incident is now in the collective memory of the whole Wenzhou church community and represents the beginning of the anti-cross-demolition campaign. Understandably, illegal construction did occur in at the Sanjiang Church but the real motive and intention of the government—hostility toward the cross and complete demolition—had been revealed. Many of the churches that put up their own resistance against anti-demolition had had members who had joined the Sanjiang protection efforts. Without a doubt, a more extensive anti-demolition and resistance campaign began to develop from that point on.

### 2.3. The Cross Demolition Movement and Church Anti-Demolition Actions

Shortly after the Sanjiang Church was demolished, China’s first blue book on national security, China’s National Security Report 2014, was published. The report mentions that China’s ideological situation was being seriously threatened, facing challenges especially with regard to religion. “Religious infiltration has constituted a threat to people’s recognition of Chinese socialism. Hostile western forces have infiltrated China’s religions extensively and in varied many ways, both public and secret, very often taking cover. Even worse, they are deceptive and provocative by nature. These outside subversive forces can be found all over China and are getting stronger and stronger.”<sup>19</sup> Mr. Zhu Weiqun (朱维群), director of the National Committee of Religion of the CPPCC (政协民族宗

<sup>15</sup> Author’s interview with Sanjiang Church’s Brother L, 30 May 2015.

<sup>16</sup> The ‘pastoral district’ is the basic regional division of the church community in Wenzhou, comprised of the leadership of adjacent churches and which (to varying degrees) shares a joint ministry, coordinates personnel and handles financial matters.

<sup>17</sup> Central Office of the Preventing and Handling of Cults. Named “610” because it was established on 10 June 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Lin Sisi, “Demolition of illegal buildings or illegal demolition: Yongjia County Sanjiang Church Documentary Encounter” (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>19</sup> See “ideological security concerns: China’s national security research report released”, the State Council Information Office website, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/8/5/document/1369714/1369714.htm>, 2016/2/24.

教委员会), attached great importance to resisting the subversive actions undertaken by outside forces by means of religion.<sup>20</sup>

Even if the Sanjiang Church was demolished due to having illegal construction, this could not be a legitimate reason for the series of cross demolitions in Wenzhou that followed. Three months after the Sanjiang Incident, according to civil statistics, there were almost 180 church crosses that were demolished in Zhejiang, more than 90 percent of which were in Wenzhou. Many of the churches had completed the proper construction procedures and had received official permits. In the face of resistance from the churches concerned, the government made it clear that they were targeting the crosses.<sup>21</sup>

Churches reacted to the Demolish Church Crosses campaign in two major ways. Some refused to remove crosses voluntarily but acquiesced to the demolition. Others actively resisted the demolition. The toughest anti-demolition resistance was seen in Pingyang County (平阳县), Wenzhou. There a local church formed a united front with other churches in the pastoral district to resist the government's demolition attempt. At around 2:00 a.m. on July 21, the Shuitou town (水头镇) government sent an almost 500-strong police force (many of whom were temporary workers) to remove the cross of Jiuen Church (救恩堂). A total of 700 to 800 believers from that church and other churches had put up a blockade. Fierce verbal battles broke out between the two sides separated by church's movable iron gate. Some of the Christians who could not get inside the gate in time were beaten up and got hurt. Four people were slightly injured, while four others were in serious condition. On July 24, Pastor Huang Yizi (黄梓益牧师) and a number of church members went to the Pingyang government to ask the authorities to account for the incident. In the party activity room, they sang hymns and prayed. Later Huang was arrested and sentenced to a one-year imprisonment.

By October 2014, the demolition actions within Wenzhou area had been suspended, though around 30 church crosses had already been demolished or removed. After October, in Zhejiang Province only a few sporadic incidents occurred in Ningbo and Taizhou (台州). This situation is consistent with the scheduling of the "The 2013 Implementation Plan of the trod Involving Illegal Religious Buildings". Stage One was the Planning Stage, from December 2013 until February 2014; Stage Two was full implementation, taking place from March 2014 to September 2014; and Stage Three was the Consolidation Stage, from October 2014 to December 2014.

After April 2015, "Cross Demolition Actions" occurred mainly in areas like Lishui (丽水) and Jinhua (金华) and these encountered strong resistance from individual churches. Later in May and June, demolition efforts expanded and intensified in Hangzhou with little resistance. According to pastoral workers in Hangzhou, all the church crosses were demolished except those of Chongyi Church (崇一堂), Sicheng Church (思澄堂), and Tianshui Church (天水堂). Starting July 2015, Wenzhou churches suffered a new round of cross demolitions. On July 22, a number of churches such as those in the Pingyang Mabu pastoral district (麻步牧区), Tengqiao pastoral district in Lucheng (鹿城藤桥牧区), Xialing Church in Lucheng (鹿城下岭教堂), and Trinity Church in Lucheng (鹿城三一教堂) issued each declared their anti-demolition positions. On July 25, the pastor of Wofeng Church (凤卧基督教堂) even extended an open invitation to Christians worldwide and overseas media to "come to our church and protect the cross of Christ together with us, to defend the dignity of a living faith and give witness to this historical moment".

By the end of August and September, lawyer Zhang Kai (张凯律师) and a number of church leaders in Wenzhou—18 in all—were arrested. Meanwhile, many churches in Pingyang city, such as Yahu Church (雅汇教会) in Xiaojiang pastoral district (萧江牧区), the Xianqiao Church (显桥教会) and Shanzhou Church (上周教会) in Mabu pastoral district (麻步牧区) and Pengjiashan Church (彭家山教会) in Aojiang pastoral district (鳌江牧区) restored the crosses on their church buildings.

<sup>20</sup> See Zhu Weiqun, "To study religious policy", [http://myy.cass.cn/kxwsl/201403/t20140308\\_1973294.shtml](http://myy.cass.cn/kxwsl/201403/t20140308_1973294.shtml), 2016/02/24.

<sup>21</sup> Author's record of FPLM's interview, the interviewee's church, 2014/07/26.



From October to December, only Shizhu Church (石柱教会) in Taizhou, Zhejiang Province had its cross removed (on 30 November). By January 2016, most of the people under residential surveillance were set free before the Lunar New Year. After three months of quiet, cross demolitions seemed to begin again. On the morning of 7 January, the crosses of Dongzhuang Church (东庄教会) and Nanhu Church (南湖教会) in Quhai district (甄海区), Wenzhou were removed. By March, a total of 49 crosses had been removed. During that period, Pastor Joseph Gu (顾约瑟), President of China Christian Council, Zhejiang Province was dismissed from his post as Senior Pastor of Chongyi Church on 21 January. On 29 January, both the TSPM & CCC announced that Pastor Joseph Gu had been arrested on suspicion of misappropriating funds. On 25 February, lawyer Zhang Kai pled guilty live on TV.

### 3. Different Responses of Churches to the Demolition Movement

#### 3.1. Prominent Collective Resistance Displayed by Wenzhou Churches

##### 3.1.1. Responses by Hangzhou Churches

Cross demolitions did not begin in Wenzhou. From the available sources of information, Christian churches in Hangzhou (杭州) were the first to be notified. The first cross to be removed was that of Huang Yu Church (黄湖教堂) in Yuhang district (余杭区), Hangzhou. This was followed by Baiquan Church (白泉教堂) in Shoushan district (舟山), Ningbo (宁波) whose cross was torn down. Compared with Wenzhou churches, churches in Hangzhou and Ningbo responded rather mildly against these demolitions.

After the removal of the cross of Huang Hu Church (黄湖教堂), a local pastor made this comment: "We are a Three-Self Church. As the crosses on the rooftops of Christian churches stood out too sharply, the government demanded the cross be relocated from rooftop to inside the church premise and that the size of the cross be reduced. This was the rectification. The authorities said that the religious symbol was too prominent, just to cite a reason. But we believed that there was no need for the change."<sup>22</sup>

Confronted with resistance from Baiquan Church (白泉教堂) in Zhoushan, Ningbo, the provincial government failed to demolish their cross by the end of the first state in February 2014.

GL Church in Hangzhou Xiaoshan district (杭州市萧山区) tried to put up resistance in their own way. A pastor of the church said, "we tried to stop them, but it was beyond our ability to do so. Most of us are old people while they are young and armed with special hand tools".<sup>23</sup> Another sister expressed her helplessness, "Is there a way we can stop them? We are just a group of people armed with nothing. We could only gather together to pray to God while they demolished the cross in the name of the provincial government. There was nothing we could do to stop them."<sup>24</sup>

While members of the rural churches are mostly old people, what about those in urban areas? I came to the largest church in Xiaoshan, Hangzhou. A pastoral staff-member said to me, "When they tried to begin the demolition, we blocked the road entrances with cars and truck. Oh boy, you know what they did? They called in tow trucks to tow away our vehicles and then tore down the cross."<sup>25</sup> The Chief Pastor of the church was reluctant to comment but said "We can do nothing to stop them. We did not want them to do so. But they did what they were ordered to do."<sup>26</sup>

##### 3.1.2. Responses from Wenzhou Churches

Following the churches in Hangzhou and Ningbo, in early April 2014, there were other Christian buildings being demolished but it was not yet clear that the provincial government was specifically

<sup>22</sup> "More than 200 People to Demolish the Cross of Hangzhou Church". *ChinaAid News Network* (27 February 2014) [http://www.chinaaid.net/2014/02/blog-Post\\_27.html](http://www.chinaaid.net/2014/02/blog-Post_27.html), 2016/02/24.

<sup>23</sup> Author's record of MYDX's interview, the interviewee's church, 2016/02/07.

<sup>24</sup> Author's record of FZZM's interview, the interviewee's house, 2015/12/24/

<sup>25</sup> Author's record of FWZM's interview, the interviewee's church, 2014/12/25.

<sup>26</sup> Author's record of MZHM's interview, the interviewee's office, 2015/12/25.

targeting the crosses. It was not until the Sanjiang Church Incident, a turning point which attracted much international attention, that the world's attention was fixed on Wenzhou. As a result, the churches began to organize a great number of church members as anti-demolition guards. This is another reason why some people have the impression that cross demolitions have occurred only in Wenzhou.

What happened to Sanjiang Church became an important reason for the Wenzhou churches not to compromise with the government. A young pastoral worker in Sanjiang Church said that at the time, "we could place the cross not on the spire but in a position lower than the maximum height, which is eleven meters, but then they told us bluntly that 'correction' means taking down the cross". In addition, some church members saw part of the government's internal documents on the "three rectifications one demolition"<sup>27</sup> (which is related to the disposal of illegal constructions by religious groups). The core goal of the government's work was to "make a comprehensive check and rectify rooftop symbols, such as crosses, on religious buildings in the whole province . . . the crosses are to be removed from the rooftops of churches and placed to the side of the church buildings in batches and by stages". After disseminating this message through the microblog and WeChat group, different churches in Wenzhou were informed and their church members were mobilized to join the campaign and become part of the church protection action.

In July 2014, a local preacher invited me to speak about the incident with his congregation. Preacher Y was pleased to take me and a newspaper reporter on a car tour of Wenzhou. Informed by those from other churches as well as by his own experience, preacher Y said, "We have to defend ourselves by having the whole pastoral district mobilized and keep working closely together. If one of our churches is notified to remove their cross, then other churches would come to their aid and stand by them together as one body. And if a cross is demolished, then other churches in the district will give offerings to that church to buy and mount a new one."<sup>28</sup> Pastor W from Longwan district (龙湾区), Wenzhou said, "We did take action to protect the cross and the church, but we had been suffering from the water supply and electricity supply being cut off . . . We do not have many church members, so when the demolition force came, we could not stop them. But when they left, we put up a new one. This cross is already the third one!"<sup>29</sup>

In a field study I undertook in Wenzhou, I was invited to take a look at five different church protection rallies. They had several things in common. First, the pastoral district staff workers were actively involved in the coordination work and went to the pulpit to preach spiritual revival messages if necessary. Next, the entrance gates to the churches were blocked with large pieces of rock to prevent large cranes from entering into the courtyards. Then, when it was close to the deadline of the demolition, the number of daily church-wide meetings, coupled with a sermon messages, would be increased to four. In addition, the number of participants would also be increased significantly. Furthermore, outside speakers, especially a church director from another town, would be invited to share their experience in anti-demolition. See Figure 1.

<sup>27</sup> Author's record of FYMM's interview, the interviewee's church, 2015/07/09.

<sup>28</sup> Author's record of MYWJ's interview, the interviewee's church, 2014/07/23.

<sup>29</sup> Author's record of MZMD's interview, the interviewee's church, 2014/07/24/.



Figure 1. Administrative areas of Wenzhou.

### 3.1.3. Analysis of the Causes of the Anti-Demolition Action of Wenzhou Churches

Throughout the course of the Zhejiang “Cross Demolition Campaign”, churches in Wenzhou displayed a greater sense of solidarity towards anti-demolition than those in other cities. I would attribute this phenomenon to two unique regional characteristics of Wenzhou: one is the pastoral district system of church organization that makes Wenzhou churches strong and consistent in their anti-demolition actions; the other is the utilitarian and pragmatic culture of Wenzhou, which has had a strong and lasting impact on the ways church members are willing to dedicate themselves to the campaign.

#### (A) Organizational Management of the Pastoral District System in Wenzhou

In Wenzhou, each Christian church (except for the newly emerging churches) belongs to a pastoral district which plays an important role in the anti-demolition actions. This can be seen in the Sanjiang Church Incident. The pastoral district of that area organized a number of meetings in negotiation and in contention with the county government and mobilized other churches in the district to act in support of the Sanjiang Church. Preacher Zhu from a church in the same district admitted that she joined the protection rally after being urged to take action through the promotion of the pastoral district. She said, “I attended the protection gathering because our pastoral district supported it, though some days later they changed their plans.”<sup>30</sup> Upon the foundation set up by the pastoral district organizations, the anti-demolition campaign gained greater momentum from the dissemination of information through Wenzhou WeChat (a social media program) as a growing number of pastoral and church members were mobilized to safeguard their church premises and the crosses in particular.

The Church in Pingyang County (平阳县) stands out distinctly for a number of reasons. The Wanquan pastoral district issued a public statement against the demolition action with the following commitments:

- regular church meetings will be organized;
- lawyers will be appointed to safeguard the rights of Christian churches;
- delegations would even go up to the Communist Party Central Committee in Beijing to petition for religious rights;
- work together with churches in the same district in an interactive and cooperative way.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Author’s record of FZQF’s interview, the interviewee’s church, 2014/12/25.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.mabumuqu.com/?p=313>, 2016/03/01.



There has also been a spirit of mutual commitment in Wanquan: if any one church is to be demolished, all of the other 14 churches will give an offering to raise funds for that church to rebuild. Preachers and pastors will also be provided to help shepherd the flock of that church.

#### (B) Wenzhou's Laity Ministry Culture

The "Study of Utility" (事工之学) is most well-known in Wenzhou culture. Philosophical work in pragmatism and utility has gradually been accumulated, broadened, and deepened into a specific school of thought. In Wenzhou's (Yong Jia) Song dynasty culture, it was as well respected as Zhu Xi's (朱熹) "Study of Jurisprudence" (理学) and Lu Jinyan's (陆九渊) "Study of Xin-Xue" (心学). The "Yongjia" school of thought highlights learning by doing, taking a practical, down-to-earth approach in the pursuit of knowledge—what is said must also be able to be put into practice and be beneficial for one's professional pursuits. This may also be seen in the religious and economic development of Wenzhou society over the succeeding generations.

Such a practical culture has made an impact on the evaluation of the direction and strategy of resistance and the choice of methods in the church's involvement in the anti-demolition actions. Wenzhou's Christian population is the highest throughout the whole of Zhejiang province and this is reflected in their efforts to gather together the greatest number of people in the anti-demolition campaign. During the protection of the Sanjiang Church, several different approaches were adopted, such as sit-in protests, using protest banners, and petitioning the Central Communist Party in Beijing. From the Sanjiang Incident, Wenzhou churches began to adopt a comprehensive and ongoing strategy of resistance and protection. Among these options, effectiveness ranks first while doctrine comes second. In an anti-demolition hymn used by the Pingyang Church to boost morale, they sang "we will not attack if we are not attacked. If we are attacked, we will counter-attack".<sup>32</sup>

In the interviewing process, I found most of the churches originally did not choose to appoint a lawyer to handle the matter in the law court by going through the legal procedure, they would say, "the Court and the government are one and the same, to go the legal way is useless." However, after lawyer Zhang Kai represented pastor Huang Yizi (黄益梓牧师) and boosted his reputation, more than 100 churches began to appoint a lawyer to safeguard their rights. There were churches who sought to take the petition way. When they successfully blocked the demolition action, they would further adopt the petition method. Whenever they failed, they would reflect to see whether this was God's Will. From this we can see that Wenzhou culture did play a crucial role in evaluating the possible means and results of any anti-demolition campaign.

### 3.2. Differences in Responses among Christian Denominations

#### 3.2.1. Comparison of Catholic and Protestant Actions

Owing to the difference in theological tradition and polity structure, there is a divergence in responses to the cross demolitions by Catholic and Protestant churches. Relatively speaking, the Catholic churches in the same pastoral district were more cohesive and acted more in unison than their Protestant counterparts. Prior to the Sanjiang Church Incident, and as early as 24 April 2014, the cross of the Catholic church located in Pingyang County was forcibly removed. In this incident, as church members resisted in discontent, six of them were injured. From April to July 2014, a total of 17 crosses of Catholic churches or parts of their buildings were demolished as each church put up different levels of resistance. Moreover, not only did local church members take action to resist, Catholic churches outside Zhejiang, such as the Catholic Diocese of Xiangtan Wang, Zhenjiang (湖南湘潭王振江司铎), Jia Shaofei (贾少飞神父) Catholic North Church in Xi'an (西安天主教北堂), and Handan Diocese Bishop Yang Shang (邯郸教区杨祥太主教) expressed support and protested

<sup>32</sup> Author's record of FXLM's interview, the interviewee's church, 2016/06/04.

in both word and action. Similarly, Protestant churches in Wenzhou as a whole acted in unison against the demolitions. However, there were also individual church committees of a few Protestant churches that followed the authority's demands and even tore down their crosses on their own. Rarely would Protestant churches from other provinces come to the aid of the Zhejiang community by word or action.<sup>33</sup>

As a mediator between the government and the Christian believers, both of the two national Christian organizations—the Three Self Patriotic Movement/Association (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC)—issued basic notices or made mild statements at different periods of time. In contrast, the Catholic Diocese used more intense, forceful language than the two Protestant organizations did. For instance, the Wenzhou Diocese expressed its strong discontent to the “Zhejiang Code for Religious Buildings” by saying that “there is no way that we can accept such a norm emotionally and intellectually”. The Diocese responded by pointing out six specific points, including the criticism against the authority concerned for having no respect for history and making a rude intervention with the general operation of the church, and accusing the government of acting on no legal basis.<sup>34</sup> On 28 July 2015, all the clergy in the Wenzhou Diocese wrote a letter of appeal to all fellow countrymen and Christians calling them to “Shout out loud! [Be] Silent no more!” The next day, all Catholic underground clergy jointly signed a declaration entitled “Regarding Our Strong Demand to Stop the Cross-Demolition Action” which began by saying “Outrageous! Bizarre! . . . all the Wenzhou diocese clergy and believers resolutely resist and strongly oppose the cross-demolition action!”<sup>35</sup>

As for the Protestants, in the public notice issued by the Zhejiang Three-Self Patriotic Association and the Christian Council in April 2014, they maintained a moderate tone, “abiding by and putting into practice the spirit of the 18th People’s Congress” and tried to correctly understand and actively join the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition”. There was ultimately a divergence of opinion between the Three-Self Patriotic Association and the Christian Council. As a result, only the latter issued a public letter saying that the Cross-Demolition Action “has seriously affected the feelings of Christians . . . is a serious violation of the constitution”.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.2.2. Comparison of Different Protestant Denominations

As far as Protestantism is concerned, there were originally six denominations in Wenzhou: Methodist, China Inland Mission, China Christian Independent Church, Chinese Independent Christian Church, The Little Flock, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. By 1958, following the call of the Great Leap Forward movement, churches in Mainland China began to have joint worship. Nominally all churches and their ministries had become non-denominational. Yet, some sects in Wenzhou still retain their sectarian characteristics, namely the Little Flock and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

#### (A) Seventh-Day Adventist Church

The Wenzhou Seventh-day Adventist Church is mainly distributed around Cangnan County (苍南县). In July 2014, I went to visit Pastor Liang from a Reformed Seventh-day Adventist Church, to participate in a gathering for a cross defensive effort. I saw a lot of large stones piled up in front of the church’s gate in order to prevent the government’s crane from entering.

The “cross guard” had been gathering for many days because the date of the government’s deadline for removal was fast approaching. An all-day gathering, the event was similar to general worship, consisting of a liturgy, prayer, and preaching. However, the preaching was mainly about how

<sup>33</sup> Author’s record of MZDP interview, the interviewee’s church, 2014/07/23.

<sup>34</sup> Catholic Wenzhou Diocese: “Several Opinions on ‘Regulations on Religious Buildings in Zhejiang Province’ (2015/5/18)”, “Tianya News Chinese Network” <http://china.ucanews.com>, 2016/02/26.

<sup>35</sup> Catholic underground parish: “A statement on the strong demand for the cessation of the cross” (2015/7/29), “Catholic Online” <http://www.chinacath.com/news/china/2015-07-29/50691.html>, 2016/02/26.

<sup>36</sup> Zhejiang Christian Association: Open Letter to the Provincial Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee, 2015/07/10.

the church was to respond to the cross demolition order. A consensus had been reached within the church (pro-defense), but people had different ideas about how to fight the demolition, both assertive (hanging protest banners) and passive (complaining but taking no action).

Anti-demolition workers at this church invited church leaders from other Protestant churches to share their own experiences in anti-demolition and discuss the defense strategies of the church. In one conference, an experienced anti-demolitionist provided a stack of materials and encouraged them to use a variety of protest methods, including legal defenses, negotiation with the government, and hanging banners. After the conference, I personally saw a note from a believer to the head of the SDAC church, saying that he felt ashamed for the church doing no better than other churches against demolitions.<sup>37</sup>

#### (B) The Little Flock Church

Since the 1980s, some churches and believers have separated from the official Little Flock Church and became a new sect, Zhaohui (召会), that is more institutionalized but not officially recognized, sometimes called the “Shouting Group” (呼喊派). Since this group is unsanctioned by the government, their church has not had a publicly registered building since 1983, and has mainly been dealt with by the government through national security bureau, not the religious bureau.

In Wenzhou Cangnan, due to the relatively loose religious environment, this church also built large-scale worship places that were not registered and were without religious signs or symbols on the facade. Under these circumstances, the demolition movement thus did not affect the church, and the church’s comments on the demolition movement were also relatively low-key in order not to attract attention. During the several discussions I had with church leaders, I found that although they also believed that the government should not dismantle or destroy crosses, they would only address specific issues or situations. The church did not publish a public statement on the cross demolitions, nor did it participate in the ‘cross guard’ gatherings of other churches. I believe this is because the cross demolitions did not directly affect them; on the other hand, because of their precarious existence, they were trying to repair and preserve a positive relationship with the government.

Compared with the low-key strategy of the Zhaohui churches, the other Little Flock churches reached an alternative consensus to protest cross demolition movement. Although most members do not have their own church buildings, they spontaneously participated in the ‘cross guard’ gatherings of the other churches. At times their own churches were threatened, and so they knew how important it was to show solidarity. When I visited the house churches of the Little Flock in Wenzhou, Raian (温州瑞安), a believer told me, “the people of the demolition team came to tear down the small cross on the door of our church. We stood in front of them singing and told them the Gospel. Later they left without doing the demolition. When they passed our church the next day, unexpectedly, they gave us a thumbs up.”<sup>38</sup> This believer’s husband is the head of the church and he showed me some of the materials he had preserved, which were about the negotiations with the government. He said that when other churches faced such situations, they went to those gatherings as well. Preacher Fang from the “Little Flock of Three-Self Church” expressed his own indignation at the government’s demolition movement. He said that their church also organized ‘cross guard’ gatherings and invited their believers to petition.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.2.3. House Churches and Three-Self Churches

#### (A) House Church

Some of Wenzhou’s house churches have church buildings. These church-based house churches can be roughly divided into three types. The first type are those established at the end of the 20th

<sup>37</sup> I saw this note at that church in Cangnan, Wenzhou on 22 July 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Author’s record of FPZM’s interview, the interviewee’s house, 2017/02/05.

<sup>39</sup> Author’s record of MFGQ’s interview, the interviewee’s church, 2015/09/12.

century, the churches having bought commercial or industrial land and buildings to renovate or build without registering as a religious site. The external religious signs on these buildings are also minimal compared with other church buildings. The churches used to be suburban, but with urban development they are now in the middle of cities. This type—also from the late 20th century—comprises those formerly-sanctioned churches that separated from the Three-Self Church. Most of these churches are located in the suburbs, such as Zeya (泽雅镇) in Wenzhou. The third type are those churches directly registered with the government but which have clergy and personnel independent of the TSPM & CCC. The location of these churches is mainly concentrated in Yueqing, Wenzhou (温州乐清).

The house churches in Wenzhou's downtown rarely have churches with prominent crosses, and so the demolition movement has had a relatively small impact on them. When I asked the older leaders of the house churches about their opinions of the cross demolitions, they argued that the Three-Self Church's persecution through these demolitions could not be compared with their own experience during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>40</sup> However, the young preachers of the house churches are more empathetic. They oppose the indifference of the church elders to cross demolitions and think that it is right to oppose the government. They expressed a willingness to attend "cross guard" gatherings at the churches being threatened.

The preacher from the Yueqing house church told me that they had more church buildings to worry about than the three-self churches. They organized different types of "cross guard" gatherings and used various methods to protest demolition. Preacher Zhang said to me, "Our pastoral area has organized many gatherings and agreed that if the cross of one church was dismantled, other churches must rush to support them. Some believers have business interests, so we let them stay in the second line and let those who have less to lose stay in the front."<sup>41</sup> Another minister of a house church, Chen Guangmei, believes that "the most important thing at the moment is to make the truth clear. When the believers understand the truth, they will know why they have to guard the cross." The pastor Chi Guantian, who belongs to the Wenzhou District House Church, emphasizes that churches should also organize petitions. Pastor Chi believes that the cross demolitions are ordered by Secretary of a provincial Party Committee. Only by petitioning the government in Beijing and increasing the pressure on the local government can they finally solve the problem of demolition.<sup>42</sup>

## (B) Three-Self Church

The Three-Self churches in Wenzhou usually placed a red cross at the highest point of the church, so they were the primary bearers of the symbol. However different churches have different relationships with the TSPM & CCC and the government. Generally speaking, churches in the suburbs have more autonomy than churches in the urban areas. Most of the Three-Self churches in urban areas were more submissive; while in the suburbs, especially Pingyang County, resistance was stronger. The Jiuen Church (救恩教堂) incident, which caused seriously injuries, occurred in Pingyang. Pingyang was also the location of serious petitions and protests. In addition, Pastor Li from Pingyang published an 'open letter' and welcomed scholars and observers from all over the world to witness the church's resistance. The so-called anti-demolition "three warriors" were also in Pingyang. In addition to Pingyang, there are also Three-Self churches in Longgang Town (龙港镇) and Tengqiao Town (滕桥镇) in Wenzhou who actively organized anti-demolition actions. I found that the Three-Self churches at the suburban town level offered the most resistance, while the Three-Self churches in the urban areas more often than not complied with the TSPM & CCC and the religious bureaus. Also, rural churches, though they have a certain degree of autonomy, have lower memberships and most of them are middle-aged and old, and so therefore can only put up a weak resistance. It is the town-level churches that have both the autonomy and demographics to effectively organize and resist.

<sup>40</sup> Author's record of MYCD's interview, the interviewee's house, 2017/02/05.

<sup>41</sup> Author's record of MZDY's interview, a local restaurant, 2015/07/12.

<sup>42</sup> Author's record of MCBC's interview, the local church, 2014/07/22.

### 3.2.4. Newly Emerging Urban Churches

Newly emerged or emerging urban churches do not have their own church buildings or crosses, so are also less directly affected. However, they also tend to be more active in public affairs than traditional churches. As they usually rent their worship spaces, and landlords must follow government rules, the resistance actions of these emerging churches may lead to their eviction. For instance, the landlord of the Wenzhou Antioch Church's building, a Christian entrepreneur, was also a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). When he came under pressure, the Antioch church had to move to another location.

The landlord of the Wenzhou Salt Light Church's space was also pressured to cancel the lease. However, after the church sent a special representative to negotiate, he was persuaded to ignore the matter. Later, the religious bureau posted a notice on the door of the church saying that it was an "illegal gathering place" and to stop meeting by a certain deadline. They also asked the pastor to come to the bureau to talk. The staff of the Salt Light Church removed the notice and the pastor and the deacon went to the bureau. Later, the bureau and the fire department came to check for inspection, making unreasonable fire safety demands which the church membership could not possibly meet. So far the church has been able to stay, but I asked Pastor Zhao what they could possibly do if they were evicted. Pastor Zhao told me, "We will choose to have group gatherings. Someone suggested that when they send a larger force to kick us out, we should follow the Beijing Watch Church and go outside to have gatherings. But I know that our church is not so strong."<sup>43</sup>

Pastors of these newly emerged churches are more likely to use online forums, such as WeChat groups. Many of them were also directly involved in the "cross guard" meetings of different churches and were even invited to be lecturers at them. Pastor Zhao of the Salt light Church even organized several small seminars during the cross demolition movement in order to promote the exchange of experience, information, and reflection among protesters and leaders of different churches. In addition, Pastor Zhao also tried to find volunteers to draft and edit informational materials on the anti-demolition methods and efforts, though this never materialized. When I was doing fieldwork in Wenzhou, I was invited by Mr. Zhao to visit several family members who were arrested during the demonstrations.

However, as newly emerged urban churches are generally independent churches, their views reflect the different opinions of their pastors. We found that several churches that started within the business community were relatively low-key on the issue. A relative of one church's pastor is actually the deputy director of the Religious Affairs Bureau. Pastor Zhao believes that he uses this relationship to protect his church, while to other churches this may like they are a patsy of the Bureau.

### 3.2.5. Analyst of the Influence of Doctrinal Tradition

As shown from the above comparison of different religious communities in Wenzhou, different doctrinal traditions result in different actions taken. The most obvious manifestation of this can be seen with the different responses of the Catholic churches as compared with their Protestant counterpart. Although, as a whole, Protestant churches also attached great importance to the cross as a symbol of their faith, in contrast the Catholic churches regard the Cross and the church buildings as being of supreme importance.

In a statement issued by the Catholic Diocese of Wenzhou with regard to the "Zhejiang Religious Buildings Code" (being a draft that was meant to solicit opinion from the public), it was pointed out that "The Catholic Church has been the biggest victim in the so called 'demolition of illegal religious constructions' because among all the religions, Catholicism has the greatest sense of inheritance . . . Such a sense of inheritance not only is manifested in the expression of the Christian faith, but is also displayed in religious art, especially in our religious constructions—the Catholic churches."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Author's record of MZXD's interview, the local church, 2015/07/17.

<sup>44</sup> "Zhejiang Religious Buildings Code", <http://china.ucanews.com> 2016/02/26.



To safeguard the sanctity of the symbol of the Cross, the Wenzhou underground Catholic Diocese issued a statement in which it declared, “The Cross is the sacred symbol of the Christian faith which is to be respected. We strongly call upon the authorities to put a halt to the illegal act of cross demolition.”<sup>45</sup>

With regard to the different Protestant denominations in Wenzhou, one of our observations was that the churches in the same pastoral areas prioritize supporting the other churches in the same district. The sectarian churches will also give priority to supporting those churches with similar defensive methods. The original advantage of the Protestants was that they could be supported by the General Assembly. However, due to the “three-reciprocal” principles of Chinese religion and the sensitivity of overseas involvement, these advantages are no longer realized.

Sectarianism can reinforce personally-held views. For example, a believer from one Seventh-day Adventist Church held a positive view of anti-demolition actions, and this is reinforced by his church’s doctrinal position. Except for the Seventh-day Adventist Churches that chose to dismantle their crosses by themselves, denominational or doctrinal influence played little role. Because of the long-term independent development of Chinese denominations like SDA, their understanding of the sectarian theological resources available is limited and not directly applicable.

The sectarian classification of the house church and the Three-Self church most directly impacted their opinions on the cross demolition. On the surface, it seemed that the Three-Self churches and the house churches had both similar and dissimilar responses to demolitions. However, when we compare them carefully through a political perspective, we can more clearly find that their views make sense based on their denomination or sects position with regard to the government and religious policy. Many Three-Self churches in Pingyang County, Wenzhou, have undertaken fierce resistance, while the Three-Self churches in the city have been relatively low-key and passive, reflecting their different political situation. That is to say, although these Three-Self churches in Pingyang are registered under the name of the TSPM & CCC, their doctrine, personnel and finances are independent of it, thus both alienated and autonomous from the political powerbrokers.

### 3.3. Comparing the “Boss Christians” and “Poor Preachers”

#### 3.3.1. Boss Christians’ Inability to Speak

People used to describe Chinese Protestant churches with the “three manys”: many elderly people, many women, and many illiterate people. Moreover, they considered the rural churches to be the mainstream of the Chinese Church. However, this situation has changed. Professor Chen Cunfu (陈村富), together with his students, conducted field studies in Wenzhou and other in Zhejiang, and arrived at a different conclusion. “The mainstream Chinese Church is the city church rather than the rural church. The future leading role of Christianity in China is no longer the rural followers (although at present they are the largest in number), but the modern emerging Christian community: they are the ‘boss Christians’, intellectual elite Christians, and young clergy.” (Chen 2005).<sup>46</sup> Wenzhou churches are famous for their boss Christians. This is so not only because they make up a higher proportion of church membership, but, more importantly, many have been elected as church council members.

During the Wenzhou anti-cross demolition campaigns, the boss Christian community had every right to speak up in church about the problem, but they remained silent due to the threat of government pressure on their financial holdings. In exerting pressure on the church, the government first targeted entrepreneurs and businessmen through tax audits. At Sanjiang Church, for instance, the government threatened, through tax inspections, all those who had made an offering of more than \$50,000 toward

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.chinacath.com/news/china/2015-07-29/50691.html>, 2015/07/29.

<sup>46</sup> Chen cunfu 陈村富, *Zhuan xingqi de zhongguo jidujiao: Zhejiang Jidujiao ge an Yan jiu* 转型期的中国基督教: 浙江基督教个案研究 (Chinese Christianity in transition: Research into some cases of Zhejiang Christianity), Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 2005, p. 119.

church construction. The leader of Jiuen Church (平阳救恩堂) in Pingyang district was once resolutely against cross demolition but when the Commerce and Industry Bureau and the Inland Revenue Department made things difficult for those churches members who were factory bosses, he ended the protests.<sup>47</sup> Another case was a boss Christian who is both a CPPCC member and also a member of the TSPM & CCC in Lucheng District (鹿城区), Wenzhou who took part in the anti-demolition campaign there. The Vice Chairman of the local CPPCC told him to shut up for the sake of his political future, and so he did.<sup>48</sup>

### 3.3.2. The Rise of the “Poor Preachers” in the Anti-Demolition Movement

Relative to the silence of boss Christians, those of ‘worker’ status have gradually assumed leadership roles in the anti-demolition campaigns. I paid a special visit to Wuxi church (五溪教会) and Hebian church (河边教会), both of which became famous during this for their persistence against the government’s actions. In place of the wealthier leaders, the working-class members took charge of the resistance campaigns which soon became outstanding and affirmative examples for other churches.

Resistance by the Wuxi church got public attention because the cross of that church had been torn down and replaced three times through clearly, legal procedures. The senior pastor told me that the church had been built several decades ago, the only new (and possibly illegal) structure a care shed attached to its side. The demolitionists from the government said bluntly that they came to dismantle the cross. As resistance was put up, the authorities checked the business transactions and accounts of the church members and their companies, but as most of the major pastoral staff were working-class citizens with no enterprises of their own, the church was little affected.<sup>49</sup>

The HB church where preacher YWJ was on staff was also on the demolition list. According to him, he pledged that “I have no enterprises whatsoever, so if anyone needs to go to prison because of the anti-demolition campaign, I offer myself to be the first one”.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, a preacher in the Yueqing pastoral district (乐清乐城牧区) told the writer, “A meeting was specifically held and it was decided that those pastoral staff who were involved—or who had family involved—in a business should stay on the second [picket] line; those who don’t have this problem and are brave fellows should be at the front.”<sup>51</sup> Preacher L, who had come to the now-famous Pingyang Wanquan pastoral district (平阳万全牧区) said, “The church has gone through some changes, mainly in the area of teaching and polity, from its former volunteer system to setting up the official position of a senior pastor.”<sup>52</sup> Such changes did have a positive effect on the resistance action put up by the pastoral district during the anti-cross-demolition campaign.

### 3.3.3. Analysis of the “Poor Preachers” Takeover of Leadership

According to a Wenzhou church preacher, at the turn of the century, the Protestant churches were already confronted with the threat of the demolition of their buildings and property. At that time, the church did not bother themselves with the bureaucratic red tape and government formalities in applying for permission to build. They simply acted like businesses, buy pieces of land and building churches.<sup>53</sup> In 1997, quite a number of churches were demolished in Wenzhou. More so in Yongjia County (永嘉县) and Dongtou County (洞头县), and in the urban area, the Doumen Church (陡门教堂). In 2000, the government also set an eye on Long Qiao Church (龙桥教堂), South Gate (南门), West Mount (西山), and the property of the Moon Gate Church (朔门教会) in the Hill of the Eastern

<sup>47</sup> Author’s record of MZCD’s interview, the local church, 2014/07/22.

<sup>48</sup> Author’s record of MLJE’s interview, a divinity school, 2014/05/17.

<sup>49</sup> Author’s record of MZMD’s interview, the local church, 2014/07/24.

<sup>50</sup> Author’s record of MYWJ’s interview, the interviewee’s house, 2015/07/23.

<sup>51</sup> Author’s record of MZZL’s interview, a local restaurant, 2015/09/16.

<sup>52</sup> Ying’s record of MLCE’s interview, the interviewee’s house, 2015/07/08.

<sup>53</sup> Author’s record of MCJH’s interview, a local church, 2012/05/23.

Wind area (东风山上), as well as the Flat Tianshan church (平天山教堂), which belongs to the Simon Church (西门教会). This was done under the premise of tearing down illegal constructions. In fact, at that time, all other illegal constructions were also being torn down. Under such circumstances, each of the churches went all out, scrambling to solicit help from entrepreneurs to ‘pull relationship’ with the government officials, saving their churches.

As religion is fast becoming a competitive market in China, the emergence of the Wenzhou ‘boss Christians’ is indeed note-worthy. Compared to other sectors or parts of society, the economy is very open. Cao Nanlai’s *Constructing China’s Jerusalem: Christianity and the Change in City Modernity* adopts a religious anthropology approach to “specifically show the faith and practice of Boss Christians in Wenzhou in engineering the grand process of the social reconstruction of the post reform period” (Cao 2013).<sup>54</sup> However, this is a subject of debate and the reconstructed social order by Wenzhou merchant Christians proposed, as proposed by the book, is just a surface phenomenon. Beneath the surface we can see that the degree of freedom of the religious market is highly restricted. The fact that some churches who built their church structures at a time when this was seemingly tolerated and even supported by the government (even when not finishing the permitting process) reflects a reserved form of management and light intervention. As Wenzhou’s business culture was not yet mature and the economy not yet stable, an economic order formed that lacked healthy regulations. Problems were bound to come up every now and then.

The case in Wenzhou now is very different from the year 2000. The ‘boss Christians’ of Wenzhou can no longer play a mediator’s role between the church and the government. Throughout the process, many churches now prefer safeguarding the cross and their church buildings. In this situation, the ‘boss Christians’ are caught in a dilemma. If they stand on the church’s side, their business interests will be investigated, but if they stand on the government side, they may be regarded by the church members as a Judas.

#### 4. Pattern of Religious Behavior under the Ongoing Tension between Government Planning and Free Market

##### 4.1. Wenzhou Church under the Tension between Religious Planning and Free Market

Wenzhou is called “China’s Jerusalem” due to its large Christian presence. Since the 1990s there has been a rapid growth in the Christian population and the reach of Christian ministry in Wenzhou, with many new churches being built. Below is a chart showing the development of Christian churches (including fellowship unions 聚会点) in Wenzhou from 1949 to 2004 (*China’s 2004 Economic Census Data with GIS Maps 2005*):<sup>55</sup>

Figure 2 indicates that the 1990s was a booming period for Wenzhou churches and thus was a lenient period for Christianity. This claim is supported by the “Chinese Christian Census (中国基督教入户问卷调查报告)” issued by Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2010. Also, it was reported that 73.4% of the people who were now Christian had converted after 1993 (Jin and Qiu 2010).<sup>56</sup>

Besides Christianity, there was also a rapid increase in the number of Buddhist and Taoist temples and constructions in the 1990s. From 1993 to 1999, there is a marked membership growth among the three religions in Wenzhou with Christians (35%) leading the increase, followed by Buddhism (25%) and Taoism (26%).<sup>57</sup> During this period, each faith had about the same number of places of worship (see Figure 2).

<sup>54</sup> 曹南,《建中耶路撒冷——基督教城市代性》Cao Nanlai, *Constructing China’s Jerusalem: Christianity and the Change in City Modernity*, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> *China’s 2004 Economic Census Data with GIS Maps* (Beijing: All China Market Research Co., LTD, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> 〈中国基督教入户问卷调查报告〉(An In-House Questionnaire Survey on Christianity in China), in: Jin Ze 金泽 – Qiu Yonghui 邱永辉 (eds.), *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* (2010) 中国宗教报告 *Annual Report on Religions in China* (2010) (Zongjiao lanpishu 宗教蓝皮书 Blue Book of Religions), Beijing 2010, pp. 190–212.

<sup>57</sup> *China’s 2004 Economic Census Data with GIS Maps* (Beijing: All China Market Research Co., LTD, 2005).

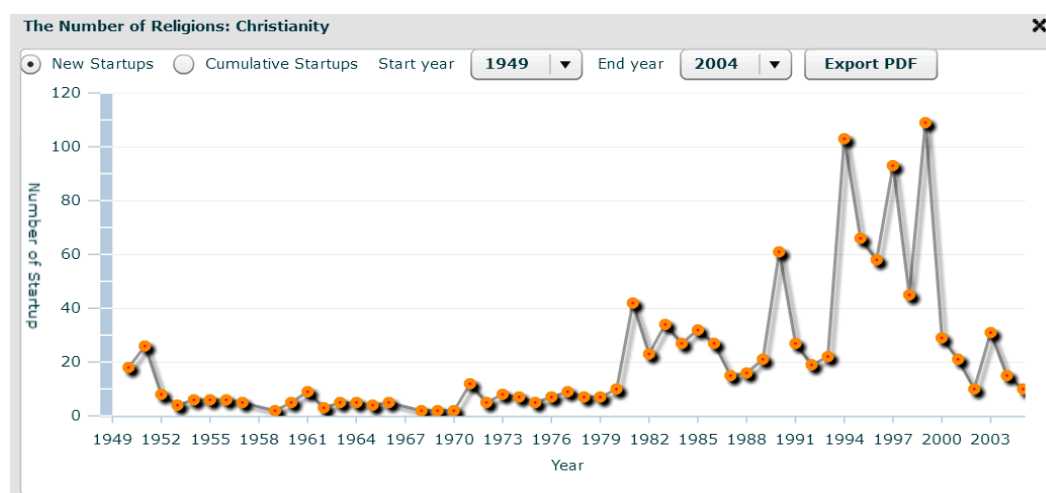


Figure 2. Development of Christian churches in Wenzhou, 1949–2004.

Figure 3 suggests that there was a high degree of freedom of religion in Wenzhou in 1990s, as shown by the significant growth of the major traditions. My impression based on my interviews is consistent with these findings. Christian ministries such as sunday schools, university fellowships, missionary outreach, and theological training all began to take off in 1990s.<sup>58</sup>

Date:26/02/2016		Total	
	Count		%
<b>Buddhism</b>	1,210		32.10 %
<b>Christianity</b>	1,233		32.71 %
<b>Taoism</b>	1,325		35.16 %
<b>Islam</b>	1		0.03 %
<b>Administration</b>	0		0.00 %
<b>Total</b>	3,769		100.00 %

Figure 3. Number of places of worship in Wenzhou.

Although the religious market naturally tends to be free and open, the Chinese government has not given up control. Instead, the Central government continued with its religious planning and regulation. The fact that Wenzhou churches were suppressed even in 2000 by the government illustrates this intent. If religious development was considered to be going too fast, the government would intervene and moderate the growth. Generally speaking, since 2000 there has been a “Christianity Fever” in China, as seen in Figure 1. This phenomenon is mainly attributed to the spread of Christianity on university campuses and among intellectuals. As Zhejiang is the province with the fastest development of Christian activities and population, it is understandable that the authorities concerned had to do something to put things under control. This explains the emergence of the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” policy and the implementation plan regarding the handling of illegal religious constructions. They are meant to correct an “overheated” religious movement: development has been too fast, worship places have become too many, and activities are too frequent.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Zhu Jianzhong, Wenzhou preacher WSP interview, 27 February 2016.

<sup>59</sup> <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20140530/cc30document/>, 2016/02/24.

In this light, the “Cross Demolition Movement” and the “Anti-Demolition Campaign” is a game between planned religion and free market religion. Instead of adopting the ‘total occupation’ policy used in 1950s, the Chinese government attempts uses cross demolitions, in the name of “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” as a control tactic. This shows that the government has realized that older policies no longer work. As for the churches, in their noble pursuit there is always the question of whether to resist cross demolitions or not, and the question of how to fight for their rights in the process, moving tentatively forward in the gradually opening-up religious marketplace.

#### 4.2. “Cost–Benefit” Exchange Theory as an Explanation of Churches’ Responses

As mentioned above, the pastoral district organizational structure helps determine churches’ responses to demolitions and the calls to resist. In this section, we will specifically talk about Wenzhou churches’ resistance patterns and how they work. Amidst the tension between religious planning and the operation of a free religious market, these resistance actions cannot be understood purely according to a doctrine-to-praxis model, nor should we say it solely determined by the government’s mode of control and regulatory activity. In response to the political and social situation, the church needs to consider both the guidance of Christian theology and doctrine and also the consideration of practical benefits. Therefore, in facing of the government’s cross demolitions, the church needs to weigh the ‘price’ to pay or ‘cost’ (such as: having the water or electricity supply cut-off, financial audits, arrests etc.) and the ‘benefits’ that can be received. Benefits include visible benefits like the preservation of the cross, psychological benefits like saving face, or spiritual benefits like the award of heaven or God’s glory). I would call this a ‘cost–benefit’ exchange model.

Let me apply the ‘cost–benefit’ exchange model to the Sanjiang Church Incident. At first, the Sanjiang Church was built upon with permission from the Sanjiang Town Construction Committee despite the fact that the application for construction procedures had not been completed. Later, it was even called a “landmark construction” by the community. On the one hand, this shows that the religious environment was more open at that time and government policy tended to be at the behest of the free market. On the other hand, the fact that no government permit document was issued left room for the government to intervene whenever it found it necessary.

When the church later received a notice from the county government to remove the cross located on the church’s spire, relocating it inside the building, the members had to decide whether to refuse or not, weighing the costs and benefits of such actions. Specifically, the ‘price’ the church needed to pay included the practical costs of calling upon as many church members as possible to guard against demolition, as well as the deterioration of church–government relationship. The visible ‘benefit’ would be of course the cross remaining intact, which would also allow the spiritual benefit of God being glorified.

In the intermediate stage, the price to be paid kept increasing: the chairman of the church organizing committee was arrested, church members’ businesses were being checked, and parts of the church were being demolished while the expected benefits kept decreasing (the cross could no longer be saved where it stood). The decision to resist or not became complicated and opinions were split, different voices for and against continued action emerging in the community. However, they persisted and engage the central government, thinking that with this escalation the benefits would increase once more.

However, at the last stage, the cost sharply increased as the demolition of the whole church became the government’s imperative, leaving little—if any—attainable benefits. The cost now outweighed benefits and so gradually church members who had been standing guard stepped down. Eventually, the whole church was demolished.

According to ‘cost–benefit’ exchange theory, the government’s approach best approach was to try to increase the cost and reduce the benefits (both visible and invisible/spiritual) of anti-demolition. On the one hand, the government increased the cost by cutting the water and electricity, auditing church members, and having church leaders arrested. On the other hand, the government reduced the



church's visible benefits by making it impossible to keep the cross and reduced the invisible benefits by stigmatizing and reducing the standing of the anti-demolition leaders. This can be seen in the case of Lawyer Zhang Kai's (张凯律师) television confession. A well-known Wenzhou pastor spoke in defense of Zhang Kai in a public WeChat group, but on that same day, this pastor was summoned by the police and was told that what Zhang Kai did was wrong and that he was "the main perpetrator of [something that] happened during President Xi Jinping's visit to the United States". Regardless of whether such information came from the provincial government or a higher level, it clearly shows that the psychological and moral benefits of the anti-demolition actions were reduced to almost nothing. Thus, it was highly probable that the Wenzhou anti-demolition campaign would rapidly decline unless another strong invisible benefit could be envisioned. It did not, as evidenced by the smooth operation of demolitions in Wenzhou since January 2016.

In contrast, for the church to effectively promote anti-demolition, they can do so only by increasing the benefits while reducing the costs to be paid. When the expected value of benefits is greater than these costs, church members will be more willing mobilize and stand up against the government actions. For example, we can know that since these demolitions were implemented in the name of the "Three Rectifications and One Demolition" policy, they would have come to a halt by June 2016. That is to say, that if church leaders wanted to promote anti-demolition, according to the 'cost-benefit' exchange perspective, they should have tried to increase awareness of potential benefits by boosting morale. They could have done so through Scripture or slogans highlighting the policy's inevitable end. They could have chanted things like "The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here"; "The Cross-Demolition Action will come to a stop in three months, come and join us to safeguard the cross of Christ"; or "To fight the good fight for Christ sake".

#### 4.3. The Denominational Pastoral District as a "Third Hand"

From the above discussion, we know that at present the Wenzhou churches are worshipping amidst the ongoing tension between central religious planning and the operation of a growing free market society. In the face of this, the church seems to exhibit a pattern that can be explained by the 'cost-benefit' exchange theory. The development of Christianity in Mainland China is analogous to the country's economic development: moving from a planned economy towards a limited free market economy. Under these circumstances, the development of Christianity tends to be diversified and 'subjectified' (being able to act on her own). Just as in the market economy, the government is to intervene as little as possible. Similarly, the government ought to minimize her interference in these churches' self-development. In fact, it is better for the government to promote the operation of a free market in religion as much as possible.

As mentioned above, the pastoral district system of Wenzhou churches has become an important factor in the anti-demolition campaigns. To a certain extent, they play a denominational and organizational function. Since the "Joint Christian Worship" advocated by the government in 1958, denominational organizations have basically disappeared. After the reopening of the church, the denominational function has been replaced by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council. Protestant churches in Wenzhou that are part of a 'pastoral district-church' structure evolved from the last century's 'church-gathering point'. Therefore, even as the church has been reopened, the TSPM & CCC has taken over the power of the ordination of pastors and church registration, while the denominational and organizational functions have been left in the hands of the pastoral district.

In the anti-demolition process, we can clearly see that the large-scale anti-demolition campaigns were organized by the pastoral districts. In the process, online communication and social media, especially WeChat groups, facilitated rapid contact, and information-sharing within the church district community. As seen from Sanjiang Incident and Pingyang Jiuen Church Incident, the pastoral district played a very important role in the anti-demolition campaign. Personal testimonies from two Wenzhou pastoral workers are consistent with this observation. Strongly cohesive pastoral districts were

highly-effective while churches in loosely coordinated districts became easy prey to the government's actions.<sup>60</sup> Wenzhou Xialin Church (温州下岭教会) serves as a good illustration. When the pastoral district became inclined to support the government, resistance to anti-demolition weakened.<sup>61</sup>

Because of their actions, the TSPM & CCC earned the ire of both the churches and the government. The TSPM & CCC showed that they were incompetent and powerless, eroding their esteem in the eyes of the Protestant community. After the cross demolitions, many church pastors exclaimed that in the future they would choose not to join the TSPM system nor to have their pastoral staff be ordained in it. Likewise, some of those who had held a post in the "*Liang Hui*" resigned after the demolitions. Relative to the incompetent 'boss Christian' leaders, the competence and organizational ability of the pastoral districts, led by professional ministers, became the most important factors in the anti-demolition campaigns. The pastoral districts played an important role in liaising, information exchange, mutual assistance, and giving directions and guidance (as part of the churches). This is clearly evident in the anti-demolition campaign put up by the Jiangbei pastoral district (江北牧区), the Wanquan pastoral district (万全牧区), and the Shutou pastoral district (水头牧区).

The pastoral districts will certainly exhibit their important denominational functions as the religious marketplace becomes freer. The pastoral district and the pastoral district staff workers' assemblies can play different roles in denominational organizations. While under external pressure, what makes churches worry the most is internal division. In this situation, whoever controls the religious resources will be most liable to impact the church. Denominations in the past functioned to hammer out the common doctrines, coordinate and organize joint ministries, and integrate resources. Today, similar functions can be found in the pastoral districts. I believe the pastoral district will serve an important function in the religious environment of modern China. Compared to Western Europe and the USA, market rationality and the spirit of trust through contract-making have not yet become available in the gradual opening-up of today's China. Under such circumstances, trust between the two sides—church and government—has yet to be developed while the gap between expectation and reality is still big. In this light, in the process of moving towards a more open religious market, the pastoral district will be able to play the role of the 'third hand' between church and state.

## 5. Conclusions

Since the economic reforms of the 1980s, churches in mainland China are no longer developing as unilaterally as previously perceived. Rather, the development of churches is becoming more divergent and heterogenous, and the clergy are becoming more professionalized through constant contact with training institutions overseas. All of these are the result of the market-driven development of religion. This market-driven orientation at the same time leads the churches to respond differently when dealing with social and political conflict. All these different responses depend not only on the divergent dissolution of Christian doctrines, but also the external socio-political factors. The actions by the churches reflect the combination of internal Christian doctrines and external social-political trends, with new explanations in the process. Based on my research, the responses of the churches to the demolition of crosses, is usually driven by pragmatic consideration first, then theological and doctrinal considerations second. In terms of utilitarian considerations, the churches, as social institutions, consider whether the cost of actions against the cross demolitions yield appropriate returns. In terms of theological and doctrinal considerations, the churches consider whether such actions can lead to the re-recognition and the reconstruction of the church itself, via targeted sermons. The choice of social considerations before theological-doctrinal considerations reflects the inadequacy of theological resources in the churches in mainland China, and their lack of social concern.

<sup>60</sup> Author's record of MYCD's interview, the interviewee's house, 2017/02/05.

<sup>61</sup> Author's record of MXZE's interview, a local church, 2015/10/03.

Wenzhou is called the “Jerusalem of China” and had enjoyed greater religious freedom than elsewhere in China. However during the “Cross-Demolition Movement” Wenzhou Christianity experienced much greater suppression than other cities. Through close investigation into the narratives of the demolition crisis, this article explored the patterns of the anti-demolition actions by Wenzhou churches, discussed the different responses from the churches of different regions, churches of different denominations in the same region, and members from different strata of the same church, and analyzed the causes of these differences. My analysis shows that Christianity in mainland China is facing growing tension between macro-regulation by government and the limited freedom of market-driven religion. On the one hand, these demolition movements showed that the government still uses the planned management paradigm when it comes to religious development: administrative restrictions of various kinds on religion, especially Christianity. On the other hand, the ongoing opening up and internationalization of the economy has led to diversification and professionalization in the Christian churches in China. This in turn makes it difficult for the government to control religion through religious planning and regulations. Through the review of the diversified responses to the cross demolitions, I have shown that there is not a clear distinction between the ‘Three-Self’ official churches and the house churches; rather, there is considerable middle ground. Although registration is means of distinguishing between these two types of churches, their doctrinal beliefs, administration, and level of financial dependence all play important roles in their relationship with the government.

The lack of market rationality and contractual relations will keep religious regulation and market responses in tension. Considering the ongoing tension in the Chinese religious environment between central government planning and free market operation, I thus offer the ‘cost-benefit’ exchange theory to explain the pattern of contentious activities of these Wenzhou churches. I also proposed that Christian denominations organized by pastoral and volunteer district organizations will play an important role in the game between ‘market religion’ and ‘planned religion’. The widespread influence of unofficial theological training since the last century and has thereby created strong pastoral district liaisons and organizational efforts, as well as improved religious education and strengthened connections within the community. This is highlighted in the responsive actions against the demolition of crosses in Wenzhou.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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