

*Removing Transcendence: Regulating Christianity in Southwest China in the 1950s**

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Abstract

The article analyzes primary sources about regulating Catholic and Protestant communities in Dali, Southwest China, during the heyday of the People's Republic. It was a process of sophisticated containment, infiltration, spying, and coercion, with a corresponding restrained use of violence. This is surprising given that, first, both Catholic and Protestant communities were small and, second, that violence against other potential threats—counterrevolutionaries and landlords—was severe. I suggest the goal for the local Department of United Front (統戰部 *tongzhan bu*) was not to eradicate Christianity by force but to divide the church into those who would submit themselves to the communist utopia and isolate the hard-core devotees with the expectation that both would eventually die out without “contaminating” the emerging socialist subjects. The regulatory process was one in which the state power attempted to remove the Christian transcendence with a communist one. The article challenges the state-society dichotomy underlying the study of Chinese religiosity, especially the claim of “militant atheism,” which depicts the People's Republic of China's early policy on Christianity.

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