Politics of Faith: Christian Activism and the Maoist State in Chaozhou, Guangdong Province

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Abstract

This article explores the Chinese Christians’ responses to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, a state-controlled mass organization designed to sever the churches’ ties with the Western missionary enterprises and to co-opt native church leaders into the socialist state during the 1950s. By looking at the experience of Christian congregations in the Chaozhou–speaking region of Guangdong province, this study examines the interactions between Christianity and state power, and the state’s influence on the religious and political identities of native Christians. In particular, it discusses how the Maoist state exploited Christianity to claim legitimacy and establish ideological control over the Christian population, and how ordinary Christians, in turn, drew on their religious resources to strengthen themselves in the competitive arena of politics.

Introduction

The twentieth century was a period of growth, suppression, and revival for the Christian churches in China. Arising from the growing interest in the history of Chinese Christianity, this article examines the Christians’