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The Collapse of Secular Social Capital and
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An Empirical Study

Xiuhua Wang*

School of Agriculture Economics and Rural Development
Renmin University of China
Beijing, China

* xhwangruc@gmail.com

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Xiuhua Wang

School of Agriculture Economics and Rural Development
Renmin University of China
Beijing, China

Abstract

In this article, we investigate the impact of social capital on religious preference in rural China using a dataset from Henan Province. Using family emigration rate and average rate of participation in public activities in the village as instrumental variables of social capital to avoid the problem of endogenous models, we find a causal relationship between social capital and religious preference based on a two-stage least squares estimation. Regression results show a significant negative correlation between social capital and religious affiliation when daily network size, Chinese New Year Greeting network size, attendance at public activities, social indifference, and social conflicts are used as the indicators of social capital. Therefore we infer that the collapse of traditional secular social capital and the fragmentation of farming communities have boosted the religious revival in rural China.

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Religions have been booming in rural China since the Reform and Opening-Up policy was instituted in 1978. According to Zheng, Ruan, and Lang (2009), 4.7 percent of Chinese people identified a religious preference in 1990, and this number increased to 13.7 percent in 2000. By 2007, there were 300 million to 400 million people with religious affiliations in China, making up about 20 percent of the total population. It is not only traditional folk beliefs and nature worship that are reviving; foreign religions such as evangelical Christianity and Catholicism are also spreading quickly (Fu 2002; Min and Han 2002). Research indicates that religions are spreading faster in rural area, a movement that has been called “religious fever” (Sun, Tong, et al. 2007; H. Zhang 2005).¹ Explanations of this religious fever in rural China mainly derive from theories involving the supply of and demand for religious products.

Based on the religious market theory of Stark and Finke (2000), religious supply theory asserts that rural people in China have more access to religious products in recent years because the decline in national regulation of religious places such as temples and churches has triggered a religious revival in rural areas (Wei 2005; F. Yang 2006).

However, religious demand theory argues that provision of public goods by formal institutions decreased in the wake of the Reform and Opening-Up policy. As a result, more and more rural people have turned to informal institutions for social security and public goods. Religious organizations, as important informal institutions, help to reduce social risks by providing public goods for their members (Ellison 1991; Iannaccone and Klick 2003). Empirical studies have concluded that the security function of religions attracts adherents (C. Chen 2002; Ruan and Liu 2012; Ruan and Zheng 2011). Wang (2008) and Yu (2008, 2010), using a cultural perspective, suggest that the Great Cultural Revolution in China destroyed the traditional spiritual world of Chinese farmers. This, along with the withdrawal of the national state from many aspects of daily life and China’s entry into the global market, has left rural areas in a “belief vacuum,” which creates an invisible condition for a religious renaissance. In rural China, the religious fever is “actually an emphasis or transformation of religious products which were quite common in traditional China” (Yu 2008: 36) Additionally, farmers have turned to religion for hope and comfort in the face of the increasing divide between rich and poor in rural China (Y. Chen 1998; Wang 2008). Empirical studies by Zheng and Ruan (2010) have proved that the number of religious adherents does decrease when the central government provides more cultural public goods, a finding that confirms the substitution effect between religions and cultural public goods.

Religious supply theory is convincing in explaining the increase in the number of religious places such as temples and churches in rural China. However, the

¹ In 2007, Shijun Tong directed a national survey of the religious situation in contemporary China.

theory presumes that the demand for certain religious products is stable over a long period. By contrast, religious demand theory seeks explanations from the perspective of individuals and rural society. The main conclusion is that the lack of social security and public goods provided by formal institutions triggers the demand for religious products. However, this argument focuses only on the substitution effect between formal and informal institutions; that is, religious institutions, as informal institutions, provide cultural and social public goods that might otherwise be provided by the central government. However, this theory does not take into consideration the mutual substitutions among informal institutions. For example, other informal institutions besides churches, such as the traditional mutual aid system, can provide cultural and social public goods such as trust, belongingness, and social security (Fukuyama 1999; Jacobs 1961). This raises the question of whether religious affiliation is in fact increasing as a result of the decrease in traditional social capital.

Social capital includes religious capital (social capital provided by religion) and secular social capital. New secular social capital can be generated through participating in religious activities (Lim and Putnam 2010). In this case, the question is whether people participate in religious activities for more social interactions and for more secular social capital.

In this article, we discuss new research perspectives on the substitution of informal institutions and the concepts of religious and secular social capital. Based on survey data from Henan Province of China, the article concludes that social capital plays an important role in farmers' religious preferences. First, we present the theoretical structures and research assumptions. Then we introduce empirical models and methods. The following section gives a description of survey data. Then we present our analysis of the regression results and test the robustness of models, followed by our conclusion.

THEORETICAL STRUCTURE AND HYPOTHESIS

Putnam (2000: 66) asserted that in the United States, religious communities are "the single most important repository of social capital" and "nearly half of all association memberships, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context," which suggests the vital role that religions play in producing and maintaining social capital in a macro perspective.

However, on an individual level, do people accept religion to earn more social capital? Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2000) suggested that people try to maximize their total social capital. Those who possess more social capital are less likely to accept religion or to change religion. Changing religion or accepting a new religion occurs when the new religion will provide more social capital than

the current religion or situation does (Olken 2006; Stark and Finke 2000). Religions usually spread along existing social networks and strengthen the social capital of the people in the network. For example, Mormonism spreads along networks of kinship and friendship as it enhances social capital among the people in the network. However, converting to a new religion happens less often than does moving to a new branch of the same religion, as the latter would lead to less of a loss of social capital (Stark and Finke 2000).

If people adopt a religion in pursuit of more social capital and social interactions, then people who lack social capital may have a stronger religious preference, other conditions being equal. In other words, people who attend more secular activities and have more secular social capital may have less religious preference (Olken 2006). Therefore, “[a]brupt social transition in China nourishes religions” (Lu 2010: 28). Specifically, rural China has been undergoing a social transition from highly organized units to a much looser society over the past three decades. Rural social groups and local governments do not offer as much social support for farmers as they used to (Q. Yang and Chen, 2011). Moreover, larger numbers of people are migrating from rural areas, and this trend disorganizes traditional social networks and leads to the fragmentation of farming communities (Liu 2009). All these factors have contributed to the religious revival that has been seen in rural China. On the basis of these theoretical conclusions, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The less secular social capital they have, the more likely farmers are to accept religion.

How much does social capital affect religious preference in rural China? Case studies and rough estimations were used to explain the causal relationship between social capital and religion affiliation in previous works; few of them are supported by strict empirical studies. However, empirical study of social capital and religion affiliation faces an awkward predicament, namely, a reciprocal causation between social capital and religion affiliation. Even though people who lack social capital are more likely to accept religion, social capital is generated among religious adherents by religious interactions. Therefore it is difficult to identify whether people with religious preferences have more social capital (Bradley, 1995; Ellison and George 1994).

Using panel data instead of cross-sectional data is one solution to this technical problem. By using a panel dataset from 2006–2007, Lim and Putnam (2010) successfully examined how social capital increases life satisfaction through religious interactions.

But how can we examine the relationship between social capital and religious preference by using cross-sectional data? Here, we use family emigration rate and

average rate of participation in public activities in the village as the instrumental variables (IVs) of social capital to observe the influence of social capital on religious preference.

Putnam (1995: 7) asserted that “families are the most basic form of social capital.” On one hand, the enormous amount of emigration that has taken place in China over the past three decades has boosted the Chinese economy greatly. On the other hand, this trend has significantly decreased the social capital of rural families. According to Wu, Ye, and Liu (2010: 109), “Only old people, young children, women and the disabled² are left in villages while all men go far away to make a living in the city.” The resulting simplification of the family structure reduces social interactions. Women “often feel more afraid than before after their husbands leave,” especially “when something unexpected happens,” as “husbands are no longer solve problems for them” (Wu, Ye, and Liu 2010: 109). These descriptions show that social support for rural women is collapsing. Moreover, these women lack communication channels and therefore do not have the information they need to make a reasonable analysis and judgment of issues. Old people and young children too are suffering more loneliness and helplessness in the villages (He, Yan, and Song 2010). Therefore we come to the following conclusion:

Emigrants reduce social network interaction in family scale, especially daily network interactions.

The movement of large numbers people out of villages and into cities decreases social interactions in the villages. For one thing, interactions in villages are greatly reduced by emigration as the number of network nodes declines. People who remain in the villages visit their friends only occasionally, on important festivals days, as most of their friends have moved to cities. Villagers are thus becoming more insular. Emigration also reduces the quality of network nodes. The people who remain in the villages are usually older, weaker, and less educated than the migrants. Hence those who stay have a natural lack of social resources. They can hardly create social capital in the rural China, nor can they establish or maintain a comprehensive mutual aid system (Huang and Tsai 2008). As a result, traditional cultural activities and organizations are breaking down (Wu, Ye, and Liu 2010). A decrease in social capital in rural areas as a result of urbanization is not particular to China. Researchers have found that social trust and cooperation have decreased in rural Indonesia with urbanization (Miguel and Levine 2006). Therefore, we conclude the following:

² It is said that there are only “386199250” left in the villages. The “38” stands for women, March 8 being International Women’s Day; “61” stands for young children because June 1 is International Children’s Day; “99” is a metaphor for the elderly; and “250” is a slang term that refers to stupid people.

Emigration reduces social capital in villages.

Even though emigration reduces social capital within families, evaluation of social capital on a village scale has not yet been done. It is possible that people who remain in villages are becoming more active in community activities when most of their families have emigrated. Perhaps they try to amuse themselves through intensive social interactions with their fellow villagers. Therefore the average rate of participation in public activities in the village can be used as another instrument of social capital. Like trust in villages (Gao and Lu 2010), public activities in villages have positive externalities. People's participation in public activities in the village will offer more opportunities for other members to join in. Therefore individuals may benefit from social capital created by these interactions. However, if the average value of public activities is lower, individuals will find it difficult to enlarge their social network size or number of social interactions, since they will have fewer opportunities to take part in the public activities. Hence we come to the following conclusion:

The fewer public activities there are in a village, the less social capital there is.

However, the average value of public activities in the village has no direct impact on individual religious preference. Mean variables on the village scale are often used as IVs of individual or of family to avoid endogenous models. For instances, Gao and Lu (2010) used mean value of trust in the village as an IV of family trust to examine the relationship between social trust and emigration; Grootaert, Oh, and Swamy (2002) used the mean value of villagers' trust, time of residence in the village, and retaining of associate community members as IVs of family social capital, examining the relationship between social capital and economic outcome. All these indicate that the mean value of variables on the village and family scales are effective and practical IVs of individual behaviors or family variables.

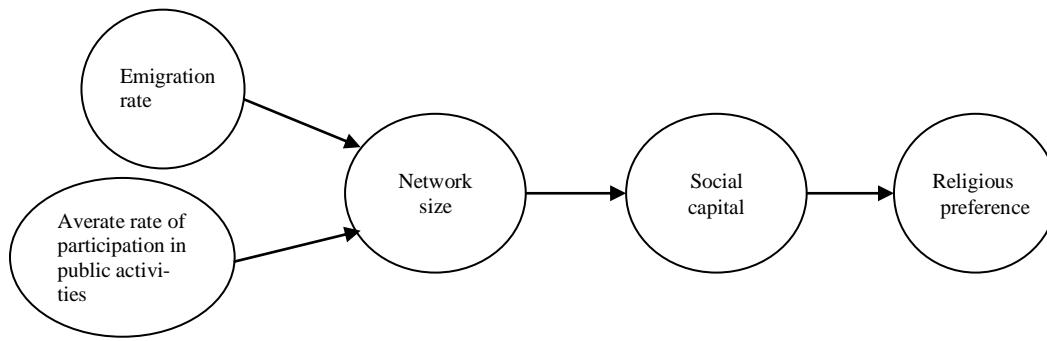
Furthermore, the emigration rate of families has no direct impact on individual religious preferences. The emigration rate of families depends on the wage gap between nonagricultural and agricultural industries, as well as on labor resources in individual households, and has no direct relationship with personal religious behavior. Therefore this IV regression model is based on another conclusion:

Family emigration rate and mean rate of participation in public activities in the village do not have a direct impact on personal religious preference.

In sum, the structure of our analysis is as follows: Emigration of families from rural communities reduces social interactions in families and the community. To get more social interactions and social capital, people may try to become more

active in public activities with their fellow villagers. Participation in these public activities is greatly affected by the total number of public activities that are provided in the village, which depends not only on cultural products provided by government, but also on the participation of their fellow villagers. If fewer people in the village are active in organizing and participating in public activities, those who hope to take an active part have few opportunities. So it is possible that they will adopt a religion if religious activities are offered. Thus farmers are likely to adopt religion when there is a high emigration rate in families and a low average rate of participation in public activities in the village (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Social Capital and Religion Relation Model



MODELS AND METHODOLOGY

According to our hypothesis, regression models examining the relationship between adoption of religion and social capital use the following equation:

$$P(R_j=1) = \phi(\beta_0 + \beta_1 Sc_j + \beta_2 \sum_{i=1}^n X_{i,j} + \mu_j) \quad (1)$$

where R_j is the religious preference of individual j ; Sc_j is quality and quantity of social capital; $X_{i,j}$ is a vector of other covariates including gender, age, education, average income, party members, and health situation; and μ_j is a random error term.

Model 1 is endogenous, as religious adherence may increase social capital through religious interactions. Using different data, Ellison and George (1994) found that religious believers have a higher level of social capital than nonbelievers do, while Bradley (1995) concluded the opposite—that people without religion have more social capital—even though the same analysis structure and variables were used to test the relationship between attendance at religious services and social network scale and social capital. Reasons for the different conclusions

may derive from selective bias and endogenous models. The fact that people with less social capital are more likely to join religions and people with more secular social capital are less interested in religion leads to the conclusion that people who are less active in religion possess more social capital (Bradley 1995). On the other hand, the theory that people regain social capital by taking part in social interactions after joining a religion leads to the conclusion that religious people have more social capital.

However, the cross-sectional data that we have cannot measure social capital as well as panel data do, nor can cross-sectional data avoid endogenous problems (Lim and Putnam, 2010). Therefore we use the emigration rate of families and the average rate of participation in public activities in the village as IVs of social capital in the following equation:

$$Ps_j = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 rworker_j + \alpha_2 Pattendance_j + \alpha_3 \sum_{i=1}^n X_{i,j} + v_j \quad (2)$$

where Ps_j is the social capital of individual j ; $rworker_j$ is the measure of family emigration rate; $Pattendance_j$ indicates average rate of participation in public activities in the village; $X_{i,j}$ is a vector of all relevant variables, including gender, age, education, average income, party membership, and health situation; and v_j is a random variable.

On the basis of the conclusions above, we will report the results of regression using the emigration rate of families and the average rate of participation in public activities as IVs of social capital in simultaneous equations of models 1 and 2.

DATA AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Sample data were gathered in surveys in Henan Province, China, under the auspices of the project titled National Social Science Fading Belief and Public Goods in Rural China. There were 362 completed questionnaires in three counties, six towns, and twenty-seven villages; 70 percent of respondents were members of religions.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the key variables of interest. Possibly because of the location of houses (e.g., near or far away from the village center) and occupations, some survey data show a social scale that is much higher than average. However, 95 percent of villagers' networks consisted of fewer than 60 people; only sixteen respondents had a network larger than 60 people, and only six respondents' networks were larger than 100 people. To give a better reflection of the regression results, we have deleted the responses from individuals whose social network size was greater than 104; this accounted for only 1 percent of the sample. The main variable that we have used to capture social capital is daily network size, as reported in Table 1. Later in this article, we will use the variables Chinese New Year Greeting network size, social indifference, social conflicts,

and individual attendance at public activities as the indicators of social capital to examine the robustness of our model. Family emigration rate and average rate of participation in public activities in the village are IVs of social capital. Age, gender, marital status, political ID, health, average income of family, religious place, parents' religion, and relatives' religion are the control variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	No. of Observations	Mean	Standard	Min.	Max.	Description
Religion	354	0.70	0.46	0	1	1, yes; 0, no
Family emigration rate	358	0.13	0.19	0	0.83	Rate of emigration in a family
Average rate of participation in public activities	362	4.82	0.06	4.67	5.5	Average rate of participation in public activities in a village (e.g., games, shows, parties)
Network size	362	17.03	20.25	0	130	Number of people with whom one has social interaction in daily life
Chinese New Year greeting network size	353	21.4	20.23	0	120	Number of people with whom one has social interaction during Spring Festival
Social indifference	355	2.43	0.80	1	5	Feeling of people getting along with each other: 1, very good, people are very friendly; 2, good; 3, so-so; 4, not so good; 5, very bad
Social conflicts	349	2.11	1.15	1	5	Frequency of conflict with others in past five years
Attendance at public activities	362	6.49	1.23	0	8	Frequency of attending public activities (e.g., games, shows, parties)

Variables	No. of Observations	Mean	Standard	Min.	Max.	Description
Religious place	362	0.84	0.70	0	3	Number of temples, churches, or other religious places nearby
Parents' religion	362	0.47	0.73	0	2	0, none; 1, either; 2, both
Relatives' religion	338	0.25	0.24	0	1	Religious adherence rate of relatives: 0, none; 0.2, a few; 0.5, half; 0.8, most; 1, all
Private activities	362	6.81	1.77	0	15.4	Doing activities alone (e.g., watching TV, reading books, surfing the Internet, listening to music, doodling)
Special experiences	362	0.78	0.42	0	1	Life experiences in the past, including working in the government, as a migrant workers outside the village, or as a soldier, teacher, doctor, or businessperson: 0, no; 1, yes
Age	360	50.3	11.88	18	83	
Gender	360	0.28	0.457	0	1	1, male; 0, female
Marital status	359	2.13	0.56	1	4	1, single; 2, married/cohabiting; 4, divorced or widowed
Average income	324	3.30	2.94	0.12	26.76	Total income of family (unit: 1000 RMB)
Political ID	356	0.04	0.21	0	1	1, Party member; 0, non-Party member

RESULTS

Table 2 reports regression results of daily social network scales and religion adoption when we control for marital status, gender, age, education, income, and health. However, the negative correlation between social network scale and religion adoption ($b = -0.0013$) is not significant enough. Control of the variable religious places increases the absolute coefficient ($b = -0.00171$) value, though not

Table 2: Probit Regressions of Religion Adoption

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Social scale	-0.00113 (-0.25)	-0.00171 (-0.38)	-0.000982 (-0.22)	-0.00166 (-0.36)
Religious place		0.439*** (3.67)		0.463*** (3.79)
Political ID			-1.019** (-2.73)	-1.141** (-2.98)
Marital status	0.116 (0.77)	0.0729 (0.47)	0.0950 (0.62)	0.0470 (0.30)
Gender	0.122** (2.78)	0.121** (2.69)	0.0969* (2.11)	0.0912 (1.94)
Age	0.0226** (2.77)	0.0226** (2.75)	0.0246** (2.93)	0.0254** (2.96)
Education	0.0256 (0.37)	0.00110 (0.02)	0.0439 (0.62)	0.0215 (0.30)
Average income	0.00752 (0.26)	-0.0144 (-0.48)	0.00235 (0.08)	-0.0211 (-0.70)
Health	-0.121 (-1.51)	-0.134 (-1.65)	-0.119 (-1.48)	-0.137 (-1.66)
Residual	-1.128 (-1.62)	-1.200 (-1.70)	-1.087 (-1.55)	-1.172 (-1.64)
Pseudo- R^2	0.0568	0.0940	0.0758	0.1161
Log pseudo-likelihood	-176.98387	-170.00612	-171.65321	-164.17366
Number of observations	303	303	300	300

Regression results excluding outliers of social network scale.

Numbers in parentheses are t -statistics.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

significantly (column (2)). Column (3) conveys a significant negative correlation ($b < -0.01$) between political identity and religion adoption; that is, Communist Party members are less likely to believe in God, which may be related to political

education in the Communist Party.³ Even when we control for both the core variables of parents' religion and political identity in column (4), there is no significance between social capital and religion adoption, which is different from results found by Bradley (1995) and Ellison and George (1994). Another different conclusion that we found, using methodology similar to theirs, indicates an endogenous model of social capital and religion adoption. Therefore we used family emigration rate and the average rate of participation in public activities in the village as IVs of social capital to test the correlation between social capital and adoption of religion (see Table 3).

Table 3 lists the regression results of social capital and adoption of religion after we control for gender, age, marital status, income, health, and other variables. Part C reports the probit regressions of social scale and religion adoption; parts A and B show the correlation of social capital and religion using IVs. The p -values of the Wald test in Table 3 are all 0.0000, allowing us to reject the null hypothesis that column (1) has no endogenous bias. The p -values of the overidentification test in Table 3 are more than 0.1, allowing us to reject the null hypothesis that these two IVs affect adoption of religion in other approaches. Therefore it is reasonable to use these IVs in the model to examine the correlation between social capital and adoption of religion.

Part B of Table 3 reports the first-stage regression of our model, which presents a significant negative correlation among family emigration rate, average rate of participation in public activities in the village, and social network size. When other conditions are equal, a higher family emigration rate results in a smaller social network size. When we control for other variables, including family emigration rate, the smaller the average rate of participation in public activities in the village, the smaller the social network size is. We control for even more variables, such as religious places and political ID, in columns (2), (3) and (4), and the coefficient of social capital is still significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

Part A of Table 3 reports the second-stage regression results using IVs. In comparison with the baseline model, regression with IVs increases the standard deviation (from 0.25 to 2.17) and decreases the coefficient value ($b = -0.244$, $p < 0.05$). Column (1) shows that a smaller network size increases the possibility of adopting a religion, while a larger network size reduces that possibility when we control for other relevant variables. In columns (2) and (3), we control for even more variables, such as religious places and political ID, and the regression of coefficients of family emigration rate and average rate of attendance at public activities in the village with social network size remains significant, as before. In second-stage regression using estimates of IVs, a negative correlation between

³ Officially, in China, people have the freedom to believe in any religion, but members of the Communist Party member are not allowed to believe in any religion except Marxism.

social network size and religion is still significant at the 99 percent confidence level.

The data in Table 3 show that it is reasonable to use family emigration rate and average rate of participation in public activities in the village as IVs of social capital to examine its relationship with adoption of religion. An increase in the family emigration rate and a lack of public activities in the village reduce the individual's social network size and hence promote the adoption of religion.

Table 3: IV Probit Regression of Adoption of Religion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>A: Second-Stage Regression</i>				
Network size	-0.244* (-2.17)	-0.291* (-2.20)	-0.245* (-2.17)	-0.295* (-2.19)
Religious place		0.801 (1.72)		0.867 (1.81)
Political ID			-1.416 (-1.11)	-1.676 (-1.11)
<i>B: First-Stage Regression</i>				
Emigration rate	-5.607 (-1.07)	-5.561 (-1.06)	-5.685 (-1.07)	-5.628 (-1.06)
Average rate of participation in public activities	-29.40# (-1.84)	-29.04# (-1.81)	-29.34# (-1.82)	-28.96# (-1.80)
<i>C: Probit Regression</i>				
Network size	-0.00113 (-0.25)	-0.00171 (-0.38)	-0.000982 (-0.22)	-0.00166 (-0.36)
No. of observations	303	303	300	300
Wald test (<i>p</i>)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Overidentification test (<i>p</i>)	0.6356	0.6134	0.5779	0.5654

Part A reports the two-stage probit estimation. Part B reports the corresponding first stage. Part C reports the probit regression coefficient from regressing adoption of religion on social network size.

To save space, other controlled variables including gender, age, marital status, income, and health are not reported in the table.

Numbers in parentheses are *t*-statistics.

$\wedge p < 0.15$, # $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

ROBUSTNESS

Sample Control

On one hand, personal career experiences (e.g., working outside the village, being a soldier, doctor, or businessperson) have had a destructive effect on traditional social networks in rural China since institution of the Reform and Opening-Up policy. On the other hand, these experiences have led to the construction of new social networks and social capital (S. Zhang, Lu, and Zhang 2007). Therefore rural individuals with special experiences (working in government; working outside the village; or being a soldier, teacher, doctor, or businessperson) may have much more social capital and a larger network size than those who have not had such experiences; hence individuals with special experiences may have a different strategy in regard to adopting religion. Therefore we have added samples with or without special career experiences in Table 4 as another core variable to examine the correlation between social capital and adoption of religion.

Columns (1) and (2) of Table 4 compare the religious behaviors of people with special career experiences (e.g., working outside the village, being a soldier or businessperson) with those of people who have not had such experiences. The second-stage results in column (1) show that farmers with special career experiences ($b = -2.954$, $p = 0.030$) are significantly less likely to adopt a religion than are those without such experiences ($b = -0.295$) even when we control for religious place, political ID, and other relevant variables. The first-stage regression shows no significant correlation between social capital and family emigration rate and a significant negative correlation with average rate of attendance at public activities in the village ($b = -29.52$, $p = 0.059$) when we control for special experiences. This conclusion remains unchanged even when we control for religious place and political ID, as in column (2). Therefore we conclude that people who have had special experiences get more social capital from social interactions in or even outside the village than from family members. Columns (3) and (4) report the correlation between social capital and religion by using samples of special experiences. In column (3), the negative coefficient of network size with adoption of religion increases ($b = -0.269$) compared with column (1). After we control for religious place and political ID in column (4), this value increases again ($b = -0.343$). These two regressions indicates that in comparison with people who have not had special experiences, people with special experiences depend more on their social network such that a small decrease in social capital would trigger a higher possibility of adopting a religion.

Table 4: Regression Model Controlling for Special Career Experiences

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>A: Second-Stage Regression</i>				
Network size	-0.252* (-2.17)	-0.306* (-2.19)	-0.269* (-2.29)	-0.343* (-2.28)
Special experiences	-2.954* (-2.07)	-3.556* (-2.07)		
Religious place		-1.445 (-0.94)		1.167 (1.95)
Political ID		0.766 (1.61)		-1.241 (-0.77)
<i>B: First-Stage Regression</i>				
Average rate of participation in public activities	-29.52# (-1.89)	-28.93# (-1.84)	-35.80* (-2.42)	-34.67* (-2.33)
Family emigration rate	-4.540 (-0.88)	-4.670 (-0.90)	-1.397 (-0.27)	-1.130 (-0.22)
<i>C: Probit Regression</i>				
Network size	-0.00251 (-0.54)	-0.00309 (-0.65)	-0.00277 (-0.49)	-0.00401 (-0.70)
No. of observations	303	300	246	245
Wald test (<i>p</i>)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Overidentification test (<i>p</i>)	0.7931	0.6965	0.5654	0.1070

Columns (1) and (2) add special experiences as a core variable. Column (3) reports regression results of social capital and adoption of religion using samples with special experiences. Column (4) reports regression results of social capital and adoption of religion using samples without special experiences.

Part A reports the two-stage probit estimates. Part B reports the corresponding first stage. Part C reports the probit regression coefficient from regressing adoption of religion on social network size.

Gender, age, marital status, income, and health are controlled for and not reported.

The numbers in parentheses are *t*-statistics.

$\wedge p < 0.15$, # $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Adding More Control Variables

Parents' Religion and Relatives' Religion. In Table 3, neither the family emigration rate nor the average rate of participation in public activities in the village had

a direct effect on religious preference when we examined the relationship between social capital and religious affiliation. Also we presumed that all the variables relevant to the model are controlled for. Actually, some other important variables that have substantial influences on religious adoption may be ignored in the models above. Therefore in this section, we add other relevant variables in an attempt to confirm the findings that were presented in Table 3.

There is an ongoing dispute in academia about whether a higher emigration rate increases the social network of people who adopt a religion, hence creating interpersonal attachments through adoption of a religion. Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2000) suggest that mass adoptions of religion are always based on an existing social network structure and that religious capital is more likely to be generated or transformed from the original social capital. Like Christianity, Hinduism attracts friends and families into religious groups through religious meetings (Stroope 2011). Does emigration of families from a village increase the number of religious members in social networks in the village? To answer this question, we control for parents' religion and relatives' religion in the next model.

Table 5 reports regression results when we add parents' religion and relatives' religion to the model. It is reasonable to use family emigration rate and average rate of participation in public activities in the village, as p -values of the Wald test are 0 and p -values of the overidentification test are greater than 0.1.

Part C is a general probit regression after we add parents' religion and relatives' religion to the models. We see a positive correlation between parents' religion and personal religion as well as between relatives' religion and personal religion. However, the model presents a weak negative correlation between social capital and adoption of religion.

When IVs are used in two-stage regressions, the negative coefficient between social capital and adoption of religions increases significantly (b increases from -0.224 to -0.278) in column (1). However, when we add relatives' religion to the model, this coefficient decreases a little (e.g., b decreases from -0.291 to -0.241 in column (2)) but remains at the 95 percent confidence level. This may result from a strong reciprocal relationship between an individual's religion and relatives' religion. That is, people may be persuaded to adopt a certain religion more easily if their relatives are members of that religion. Yet there is no such correlation in the regression with parents' religion, as parents usually adopt a religion before their children do. Hence the correlation effect is reduced between social capital and the adoption of religion when we control for relatives' religion.

Table 5: IV Probit of Adoption of Religion Controlling for Parents' Religion and Relatives' Religion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>A: Second-Stage Regression</i>				
Network size	-0.278*	-0.241*	-0.239*	-0.268*
	(-2.17)	(-2.18)	(-2.16)	(-2.06)
Parents' religion	0.565		0.295	0.338
	(1.37)		(0.73)	(0.77)
Relatives' religion rate		3.353**	2.840*	2.086
		(2.58)	(2.05)	(1.42)
Special experience				-3.168
				(-1.95)
<i>B: First-Stage Regression</i>				
Emigration rate	-5.691	-6.196	-6.142	-4.989
	(-1.06)	(-1.11)	(-1.09)	(-0.91)
Average rate of participation in public activities	-29.06#	-30.54#	-30.52#	-28.55#
	(-1.80)	(-1.81)	(-1.81)	(-1.73)
<i>C: Probit Regression</i>				
Network scale	-0.00159	-0.00259	-0.00215	-0.00320
	(-0.34)	(-0.52)	(-0.43)	(-0.62)
Parents' religion	0.543***		0.329*	0.333*
	(4.17)		(2.20)	(2.21)
Relatives' religion		2.776***	2.242***	2.191***
		(4.48)	(3.48)	(3.37)
Special experience				-0.271
				(-0.97)
No. of observations	300	287	287	287
Wald test (<i>p</i>)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Overidentification test (<i>p</i>)	0.4680	0.5139	0.4451	0.5608

Part A reports the two-stage probit estimates. Part B reports the corresponding first stage. Part C reports the probit regression coefficient from regressing adoption of religion on social network size.

Variables of gender, age, marital status, political ID, income, health, and religious place are controlled for and not reported.

Numbers in parentheses are *t*-statistics.

$\wedge p < 0.15$, # $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Private Activities. An empirical study conducted in Indonesia shows that secular activities such as watching television reduces the rate of adoption of religion (Olken 2006). This raises the question of whether it is possible that family emigration rate and average rate of participation in public activities affect the adoption of religion by affecting private activities (activities that are done alone, such as reading, watching TV, surfing the Internet, listening to music, or being alone and doing nothing) instead of social interaction. Therefore we add private activities as another control variable to model (see Table 6).

Table 6: IV Probit Regression of Religion Adoption Controlling Private Activities

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>A: Second-Stage Regression</i>				
Network size	-0.202*	-0.237*	-0.183*	-0.219*
	(-2.32)	(-2.39)	(-2.27)	(-2.36)
Private activities	0.107	0.129	0.120	0.138
	(0.69)	(0.71)	(0.84)	(0.82)
Religious place		0.184		0.207
		(0.44)		(0.54)
Parents' religion			0.561	0.565
			(1.90)	(1.65)
<i>B: First-Stage Regression</i>				
Emigration rate	-8.547 [^]	-8.522 [^]	-8.670 [^]	-8.671 [^]
	(-1.47)	(-1.47)	(-1.48)	(-1.48)
Average rate of participation in public activities	-27.97 [^]	-28.40 [^]	-28.16 [^]	-28.62 [^]
	(-1.59)	(-1.61)	(-1.59)	(-1.62)
<i>C: Probit Regression</i>				
Network size	-0.00251	-0.00176	-0.00246	-0.00169
	(-0.60)	(-0.42)	(-0.57)	(-0.39)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
No. of observations	303	303	303	303
Wald test (p)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Overidentification test (p)	0.2628	0.2444	0.1907	0.1750

Columns (1) and (2) add special experiences as a core variable. Column (3) reports regression results of social capital and adoption of religion using samples of people with special experiences. Column (4) reports regression results of social capital and adoption of religion using samples of people without special experiences.

Gender, age, marital status, income, health, and political ID are controlled for and not reported.

Numbers in parentheses are t -statistics.

$^{\wedge}p < 0.15$, $\#p < 0.1$, $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$.

The p -values of the Wald test in Table 6 are all less than 0.05, so we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the model is endogenous. The p -values of the overidentification test are more than 0.1, so there is no significant correlation between IVs and residuals in the model. Therefore it is reasonable to use family emigration rate and average rate of participation in public activities in the village as IVs of social network size.

When the variable private activities is added to the model, the coefficients of family emigration rate and average rate of participation in public activities in the village with social network size are still above the 85 percent confidence level in the first-stage regression, while the negative coefficient between social capital and network size changed little in the second stage (e.g., from -0.230 to -0.237 in column (2)). Even when parents' religion is added to the model in column (4), the negative coefficient between social capital and religion remains significant.

Other Variables Examining the Correlation Between Social Capital and Adoption of Religion

Because of the diverse concepts of social capital in theoretical research, indicators of social capital are various. They include social network size, network heterogeneity (Bian 2004), trust (Durlauf and Fafchamps 2004), party membership and civic engagement (Putnam 1995, 2002), and bonding and bridging (Wuthnow 2002). We use four other indicators of social capital in this section of the article to examine the robustness of the model above: Chinese New Year Greeting network size, attendance at public activities, social indifference, and social conflicts (see Table 7).

Table 7: Chinese New Year Greeting Network Size, Attendance at Public Activities, Social Indifference, and Social Conflicts as Indicators of Social Capital

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>A: Second-Stage Regression</i>				
Chinese New Year Greeting network size	-0.108** (-2.76)			
Attendance at public activities		-0.894*** (-3.93)		
Social indifference			3.364* (2.03)	
Social conflicts				1.757** (2.80)
<i>B: First-Stage Regression</i>				
Emigration rate	-0.413 (-0.07)	0.0710 (-0.27)	0.214 (0.59)	0.352 (1.06)
Average rate of participation in public activities	-7.094** (-3.04)	-0.902*** (8.21)	-0.330* (-2.01)	-0.494*** (-3.57)
<i>C: Probit Regression</i>				
Chinese New Year Greeting network size	-0.00928* (-1.97)			
Attendance at public activities		-0.305*** (-3.35)		
Social indifference			-0.00956 (-0.13)	
Social conflicts				0.0161 (0.20)
No. of observations	299	303	295	298
Wald test (<i>p</i>)	0.0000	0.0016	0.0000	0.0000
Overidentification test (<i>p</i>)	0.4558	0.1293	0.8155	0.9986

Reports regression results of social capital and adoption of religion using samples with special experiences. Column (4) reports regression results of social capital and religion adoption using samples without special experiences

Gender, marital status, age, political ID, income, health, special experiences, private secular activities, religion place, and parents' religion are controlled for in the model and not reported.

The numbers in parentheses are *t*-statistics.

[^]*p* < 0.15, # *p* < 0.1, * *p* < 0.05, ** *p* < 0.01, *** *p* < 0.001.

Chinese New Year Greeting Network Size. Bian (2004) used the Chinese New Year Greeting network (the network that is formed by exchanging greetings and paying visits during the Spring Festival in China) as an indicator of social network size. Every year during the Spring Festival, the most important holiday in China, people contact and send good wishes to all their friends, colleagues, and relatives via face-to-face visits, phone calls, e-mails, and other methods. The Spring Festival is also known as Lunar New Year. Hence the social network generated by these social interactions is referred to as the New Year Greeting network, and it tends to be a Chinese person's largest network (Bian et al. 2005). The New Year Greeting network is quite different from the daily network. In daily life, Chinese people tend to interact with coworkers, close friends, and family members, while the New Year Greeting network can also include anyone whom a person knows but contacts infrequently. Thus the New Year Greeting network usually contains the most social contacts a person can have in China, while the daily network contains only a subset of these people. Hence for ordinary Chinese people, the daily network size is very likely to be smaller than the New Year Greeting network size. However, people in certain career positions may have larger daily networks. For example, in rural areas, someone who runs a small business near a highway may interact with many strangers on a daily basis and have contact with fewer people during the Spring Festival.

The New Year Greeting network can be quite different from the daily social network. As more and more people are working in cities, they participate in social interactions in the village only during the Spring Festival. For farmers, the daily network consists of the people with whom the farmer lives and interacts closely every day; the size of a farmer's New Year Greeting network is always larger than the daily network. Because social capital can be generated by the New Year Greeting network, we use New Year Greeting network size instead of daily network size as an indicator of social capital in column (1) of Table 7 to better measure social capital. The first-stage regression in part B indicates that emigration significantly reduces social capital in the village. Also, there is a negative correlation between public activities in the village and New Year Greeting network size. The second-stage regression indicates a significant negative correlation between social capital and network size ($b = -0.108, p < 0.05$) as well.

Personal Attendance at Public Activities. Putnam (2000) asserted that people enhance their network connections and facilitate the flow of information and trust by attending public activities; therefore attendance at public activities is an important way of building social capital. Miguel and Levine (2010) also use attendance at public activities as an indication of social capital to examine the role of social capital in risk security. Hence in column (2) of Table 7, we use frequency of individual attendance at public activities as an indicator of social capital to examine

its correlation with religion. In part C, a negative coefficient between attendance at public activities and religion indicates that people who do not attend public activities are more likely to adopt religion. However, religion may change a person's interest in public activities. Hence the correlation in parts A and B of Table 7 between social capital and religion will be examined by using the IVs of family emigration rate and average rate of participation in public activities. The first-stage regression indicates that a higher emigration rate results in a lower frequency of attending public activities and a positive correlation between average rate of attendance at public activities and private activities. In the second-stage regression, there is a more significant negative correlation between attendance at public activities and social capital ($b = -0.894$); the higher the frequency of attendance at public activities, the lower is the rate of adoption of religion, while the first-stage regression indicates that a higher emigration rate results in a lower frequency of attending public activities and a positive correlation between average rate of attendance at public activities and personal activities.

Social Indifference and Social Conflict. A community in which social capital is high has shared values and norms, and its members are able to trust and help each other (Putnam 2000). This type of community is called a harmonious society (*he xie she hui*) in official statements of the Chinese government. It is the ideal type of society in China, deriving from the philosophies of Confucius and Lao Tzu. In contrast to the harmonious society, a community that lacks enough social capital will experience distrust and fragmentation (Fukuyama 1999). This was examined by using the variable social indifference and social conflicts in our survey.

In the survey, the rural residents were asked the question "What do you think of the social relationship between villagers in your community?" The possible responses were "very good, people are very friendly" (1); "good" (2); "so-so" (3); "not so good" (4); and "very bad, people are very unfriendly to others (5)." Then the indifference level of village is used as an indicator of social capital in column (3) of Table 7. The higher the indifference level, the lower is the social capital in the community. The regression results in part C show a weak negative coefficient between social indifference and religion. This indicates that people who feel more indifferent in society are less likely to adopt religion, which is quite opposite to what we had hypothesized. However, this coefficient is not significant enough. The two-stage regression results show that there is a significant positive correlation between social indifference and religion in the IV method, that is, people who feel more indifference in the village are more likely to adopt a religion. This diverse conclusion shows a strong intrinsic correlation between social indifference and religion. It also implies that people may have reduced feelings of social indifference after participating in more social interactions and mutual aid in their religious groups.

First-stage regression results also give us a lot of information about rural China. When we control for other variables in the model, a higher family emigration rate made the survey respondents feel worse about the social relationships in the village, while a higher average rate of participation in public activities in the village seems to increase the friendliness of the village. These results may offer some solid evidence that a higher rate of emigration from the village increases social indifference in the village. This indifference motivates people to choose religion for spiritual security. Moreover, a reduction in public activities in the village increases this indifference. In addition, we can see that religion does warm people's hearts and makes them feel less alone and sad when they join religious groups.

A society that has less social capital is more likely to experience social conflicts, Hence in column (4) of Table 7, we use social conflicts to measure social capital. In the survey, respondents were asked the question "Over the past five years, how often did you quarrel with or conflict with people in your community?" The possible responses were "never" (1), "a few times" (2), "the same as other people" (3), "many times" (4), and "much more than other people do" (5). Regression results show a positive correlation between social conflicts and adoption of religion; that is, the more social conflicts there are in a village, the more likely it is that individuals will adopt religion. However, social conflict describes a situation that occurs as a result of lack of social capital rather than being a good indicator of it. Hence we may draw a more accurate conclusion that people in a community in which there is less social capital and more social conflicts have more of a tendency to believe in God.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this article, we have used family emigration rate and average rate of participation in public activities in the village as instrumental variables of social capital to examine the relationship between social capital and religious affiliation in rural China. Regression results present a negative correlation between daily network size and religious preference when we control for other relevant variables. This conclusion remains significant even when we control for religious sources (religious place, parents' religion, and relatives' religion) and special experiences (e.g., working outside the village, being a soldier or businessperson). Moreover, this conclusion remains stable when other variables (New Year Greeting network size, social indifference, social conflicts, individual attendance at public activities) take the place of daily network as the indicator of social capital in the model.

The empirical study that we examined in this article shows a significant negative correlation between social capital and religious preference in rural China.

Hence the religious revival in rural China over the past thirty years should be understood in the changing social context of urbanization.

On one hand, the failure of formal institutions to provide enough public goods has greatly reduced social interaction in rural society. On the other hand, social capital in rural communities is sharply decreasing because a large number of people are moving out of the villages as part of the trend toward urbanization and industrialization around the world (Miguel and Levine 2003). With more and more people moving out of small communities, the traditional family structure and community structure are collapsing.

As a result, social interactions become even fewer, and it is difficult for villagers to get to know each other well. Therefore social networks in contemporary rural China have become such that “many insular individuals live inside strong ties based on kinship” (Xun and Zuo 2009: 152). From extensive research across China, Huazhong scholars (led by Yong Xu and Xuefeng He) have concluded that rural China is undergoing a transition from a traditional acquaintance society to a semi-acquaintance society and even a stranger society (He 2002; Xu 2007; Zhou 2005). Finally, more and more villagers have been showing themselves to be immature individuals as “they began placing more emphasis on their rights and entitlements to family property, while downplaying their duties and obligations” (Yan, 2003: 6). Rural China is hence in a process of fragmentation (Wen 2010; Yao 2004), which indicates the weakening of social network ties, loss of social capital, and disorganization of the traditional comprehensive, strict, and closed culture nexus of power (Duara 1988).

In this social context of fragmentation that is occurring in rural China, religious revival is a possible strategy that rural people can use to resist the indifference of modern society by reestablishing a closed network community and having frequent religious interactions. People who are engaged in religious interactions are likely to gain new secular social capital and reconstruct communal groups in the urbanization of rural society.

However, social capital is a complicated concept, and the indicators discussed above are not enough to cover all the issues. More investigations and stricter definitions are needed to better understand the relationship between secular social capital and religious preference. Therefore in a future article, we will use the China General Social Survey to examine whether the trust radius that was originally based on kinship has changed because of the influence of Christianity, which advocates equality among all people. Such a study could help us to understand better how religions have changed or reconstructed social capital in contemporary China.

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