

Article

Does Ideological Education in China Suppress Trust in Religion and Foster Trust in Government?

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Academic Editor: Mark G. Toulouse

Received: 31 March 2017; Accepted: 9 May 2017; Published: 15 May 2017

Abstract: A major goal of ideological education in China is to promote loyalty to the party-state and to instill atheism among the people. How effective is this ideological education? This article examines the relationship between education and trust in government and trust in religion using data from the 2010 Chinese General Social Survey. We find that education is negatively associated with trust in government, while positively related to trust in religion. Our findings suggest that policies aimed at displacing religion in favor of the Communist ideology have largely failed to shape the public mindset; rather, the more educated, the more people tend to trust religion instead of the government.

Keywords: trust; religion; Chinese society; education

1. Introduction

Education in China has been designed to reproduce successors of the communist endeavor (YPC 2005). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wants the entire school system to indoctrinate Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (MLM), which includes atheism as an integral component of historical materialism (Ge 2016). In 2016, the CCP intensified its efforts to ensure universities' allegiance to the party-state and the government called the universities to become CCP strongholds for MLM (Phillips 2016; Reuters 2016). Our research question is, how effective is the CCP ideological education in instilling loyalty to the party-state and upholding atheism against religion? If it is effective, the more education one receives, the more one is likely to trust the party-state and distrust religion.

In Western societies, some studies have found a positive association between education and trust in government (Deary et al. 2008; Schoon et al. 2010). For example, Schoon and Cheng (2011) found that individuals with higher education tend to express higher levels of trust in government. Other studies have shown a negative association between trust in government and education (Döring 1992). As for the relationship between education and religion, previous research reveals that higher education is associated with less trust in religious institution (Hill 2011), and secular education has a negative effect on religiosity, including prayer, church attendance, and belief in God (Reimer 2010; Schwadel 2015).

However, little is known about whether education in Communist China is fostering trust in government and distrust in religion. This article aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between education and trust in government and religion. Data are from Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS 2010) collected in 2010.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Ideological Education in China

Education has not been an autonomous social institution in China since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Before 1979, the entire education system weighed so-called "redness," i.e., loyalty to the party-state, much more over knowledge of science and humanities. Since the late 1980s, with the adoption of the Reform and Opening-up Policy, the ideological control over education relaxed to certain degree. With the general task for economic development, there has been a greater emphasis on preparing skilled workers through education. Indeed, there was a decade of thought liberalization in the 1980s, during which there was greater tolerance toward modern Western values such as individualism, freedom and democracy. This led to a growing demand for press freedom and political democracy, together with increased public discontent with corruption and inflation (Lee and Ho 2005). After 1990, the CCP leaders began to reinforce ideological education in schools and universities (Zhao 1998).

Ideological education in China unfolds in a systematic way, all the way from primary school to graduate program. As written in the Guidelines of the People's Republic of China Educational Law, "Schools and teachers shall conduct education based on dialectical materialism and historical materialism and have the duty and right to protect atheism." Students are required to take courses of ideological and political education (sixiangzhengzhijiaoyu 思想政治教育). In regular school curricula, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is taught under the general subject of "politics." In elementary school, this falls under the course on "ideological and moral education"; in middle school, it falls under "ideological and political education" (MEPRC 2001); in high school, this falls under courses on "Common Knowledge of Economics," "Common Knowledge of Philosophy," and "Common Knowledge of Politics." These courses in elementary to high schools are mandatory. In college, all students are required to take "Basic Theory of Marxist Philosophy," "Basic Theory of Marxist Economics," "Basic Knowledge of Mao Zedong Thoughts," "Basic Knowledge of Deng Xiaoping Theory and the Three Represents," "Ideological and Moral Education," "Basic Knowledge of Law," "Modern History of China," and "Political Situation and Policy." Students must pass the examinations of these "politics" courses in order to move up to the next grade and finally to graduate. Ideological and political courses constitute an important component in the National College Entrance Examination (gaokao 高考). In order to enter an elite university, students must do well in these subjects, including memorizing the concepts and theories of MLM. The ideological and political education is aimed at instilling students with the right worldview, political attitude, and morality guidelines, thus instilling in them the support for the CCP (MOE 2001).

The pervasiveness of ideological education does not fade away as one grows from childhood to adulthood. Instead, Marxism is predominant in every stage of formal education. The CCP places a great emphasis on ideological education in universities, even though the university is generally considered to be a relatively liberal institution in a society. However, in the view of the CCP, universities are the frontline of ideological work, and college students should be trained to be loyal Marxists and have solid confidence in the leadership of the CCP. The ideological guidance and control in colleges and universities are often reiterated by political leaders (Ge 2016).

Besides requiring all students to take ideological and political courses, the authorities also make great efforts in recruiting outstanding students to become CCP members. In elementary schools, children are encouraged to join in the Young Pioneers of China (YPC), which is their first exposure to the Communist ideology. The official mission of the league is to promote the "indoctrination of children by cultivating attachment to the Party and the socialist motherland" (YPC 2005). To join, students must take an oath during the ceremony of declaring membership, "We take our oath under the flag of Young Pioneers: I promise to follow the lead and teachings of the Chinese Communist Party, to study well, to work well, to labor well – to prepare myself and sacrifice all my energy for Communism." Entering middle school, students are encouraged to join in the Communist Youth

League of China (CYLC), which is open to young people between the ages of 14 and 28 years. Still, the league recruits only outstanding students. Being a member is a major step in the preparation for becoming a full member of the CCP. Membership in the youth league marks excellence, which may help students receive financial aid. Membership in the CCP is rather popular among college students. It is reported that, in 2010, 21 million new applications for membership in the CCP were received (Hunt 2011), but only a limited number of applicants were accepted into it. The fierce competition suggests students' enthusiasm for the membership.

2.2. Patriotic Education for the Party-State

Chinese authorities work hard to promote the support for the party-state, not only in the name of arming people with the MLM worldview, but also in the form of patriotism. Since 1993, the Ministry of Education has included patriotism as a guiding principle for China's educational reform. The content of patriotic education, stipulated in 1994, is featured with two themes: Chinese tradition and history, and national unity and territorial integrity (Zhao 1998). Loving the CCP is embedded in the content of patriotism, asserting that it is the CCP that has led China out of poverty and humiliation, fought against Western powers, and now is leading China on the road to communism. The narration of Chinese contemporary history in history textbooks has lent unquestionable legacy to the CCP's rule (Eades 2016). The course, The State of the Nation (guoqing 国情) was added in various schools to instill students with patriotic sentiments. Apart from course work on campus, schools and universities also organize students to visit historical sites, attend museums of revolutionary martyrs, and listen to lectures on China's current situation in order to conduct patriotic education (Zhao 1998).

Ideological and patriotic education has successfully fused government, country, state, and the party. The four have become one and the same. For this reason, we refer to the government and the party interchangeably in this article. In China, loving the country shall be manifested by support for the government and loyalty to the party, otherwise it is not loving or not loving enough (Chen 2014). The aforementioned ideological and patriotic education enhances confidence in the leadership of the CCP (Xin 2016).

Ideological and patriotic education may be effective to some extent. According to official reports, there are large numbers of college students applying to join the CCP, which may indicate a great enthusiasm for the party (Hunt 2011). However, the phenomenon cannot be simplistically taken as an evidence for the positive association between education and confidence in the government. Some studies have revealed that CCP membership consistently predicts better life chances, such as scholarship opportunities, better jobs, and promotions in work (Liang et al. 2008). That is, many young people join the party for such tangible gains in life.

Previous studies on education and trust in government in the West provide some theoretical explanation for this relationship. In general, the more well-educated and better-off individuals tend to support the current government, for they are the privileged group in the society. Thus, education predicted more trust in the government (Deary et al. 2008; Schoon et al. 2010; Schoon and Cheng 2011). However, Deary et al. (2008) claimed that the more educated, the more people are likely to favor democratic government over traditional authority. People tend to trust the government more if there is high quality of democracy and transparency in governmental activities (Bannister and Connolly 2011; Welch et al. 2005). Moreover, Hakhverdian and Mayne (2012) pointed out that the effect of education on trust in government may differ in societies with or without political corruption. Education is negatively related to trust in government in corrupt societies, and positively related to trust in clean societies.

However, there is no study that has examined whether the ideological education with patriotic content can foster trust in government in China. On the one hand, there is an on-going ideological propaganda of loving the country and the party; on the other hand, China is an authoritarian government where the government is involved in political corruption. Studying education and trust in government in China can provide some insights in understanding the dynamics between education and political context.

2.3. Atheist Education and Institutional Religions

Consistent with the efforts in ideological and patriotic education, education against religion is among the important tasks of the party-state. The CCP, as the self-asserted vanguard of advanced members guided by Marxism, rejects religion as a false consciousness and political enemy because of the fundamental difference between the two, atheism versus theism. In the argument of historical materialism, religion is something that is doomed to disappear as society advances into a higher stage of development (Marx 1973). Apart from the incompatibility between atheist Marxism and religion, Chinese leaders assert that institutional religions are closely linked to both foreign cultural imperialism (Christianity) and feudalism (Buddhism and Taoism) (Leung 2005). Christianity has been stigmatized as an “alien” religion that might be used by Western forces to conquer the Chinese nation. Religion, thus, was tightly controlled by the CCP, and even wiped out from society during the Cultural Revolution.

The regulation on religion and religious activities demonstrates an unfavourable, if not unfriendly, attitude towards religion. In 1982, the CCP Central Committee formulated “The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Affairs during the Socialist Period of Our Country,” which is often known as Document No. 19. It summarizes five characteristics of religion in Chinese society: it will exist for a long time; it has masses of believers; it is complex; it entwines with ethnicity; and it affects international relations (see (Yang 2004, p.105)). The party acknowledges the existence of religion in current Chinese society and thinks that, as Chinese society progresses into a later stage of socialism, religion will disappear. In Marx’s words, people will no longer need religion for illusory happiness. Although the right to believe in any religion has been written in China’s Constitution, the state only protects what the authorities regard as “normal” religious activities.

In the school curricula, education about religion is conducted in a secularist approach. Religion is introduced to students in the standpoint of MLM. For example, it teaches that the majority of ethnic Han people do not believe in religion (Nanbu 2008). Islam is a religion believed by people mainly in Western and Southeastern Asia, and Northern and Eastern Africa (Nanbu 2008). To distance people from believing in religion through education is effective to some extent. The percentage of religious believers in China is very low compared with the rest of the world. According to the Spiritual Life Survey of Chinese Residents in 2007, 22% of the total 7021 respondents claimed to be religious. This is relatively higher than the figure from the official report by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), which indicated about 100 million religious believers by the year of 2012 (SARA 2012).

Previous studies of education and religion in Western societies reveal that secular education has a negative effect on the certainty of theistic belief (Reimer 2010; Schwadel 2015). This is partly because secular philosophies and the methods of natural and social sciences help instill individuals with a skeptical attitude towards religion and a disbelief in super-empirical explanations (Hill 2011). Also, in the United States, higher education is correlated with lack of trust in religious institutions (Hill 2011). Note that the relationship between education and religion, as measured by religiosity, varies across nations, from negative to positive (Schwadel 2015). Sacerdote and Glaeser (2001) found that socialist countries have strongest negative relationships between education and beliefs and religious attendance. These studies would lead one to expect that the more education the Chinese receive, the less they would trust in religion.

In summary, education in China is conducted in a way to indoctrinate Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, instill the love of the country and the party, and reject religion at the same time. Our question is, does ideological education in China produce loyalty to and confidence in the party-state while also producing hostility against and distrust in religion? Based on the literature review above, we would like to test these hypotheses for people in China:

Hypothesis 1 [H1]: Trust in government is higher than trust in religion.

Hypothesis 2 [H2]: Education is negatively correlated with trust in religion.

Hypothesis 3 [H3]: Education is positively correlated with trust in government.

3. Data and Methods

The data used in this study come from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) collected in 2010. The CGSS, launched in 2003, is the earliest nationally representative survey project run by academic institutions in mainland China. The survey aims at systematically monitoring the changing relationship between social structure and quality of life in both urban and rural China. It includes several modules designed to collect information about health, lifestyle, migration, social attitude, class identity, political attitude, and behaviour, etc. The modules may vary from year to year in order to address important social issues. The data we used were collected in 2010, which at the first time included a module about religion. The survey follows a multi-stage stratified sampling design with three sampling stages: primary sampling units (PSU) are county-level units, and there are 2762 PSUs in the sampling frame; secondary sampling units (SSU) are community-level units (villages ‘cun’ and neighborhood committees juweihui 居委会); in each selected SSU, 25 households are sampled via the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) method; in each selected household, an adult aged at least 18 years is sampled with a Kish grid (see CGSS n.d.). The total number of respondents in the 2010 dataset is 12,000.

3.1. Dependent Variables

There is a series of questions about trust, from which we derived two dependent variables, trust in religion and trust in government. Both variables were obtained from principal component analysis (PCA). PCA is a statistical procedure that converts a set of highly correlated variables into a set of values of linearly uncorrelated variables. These new variables are called principal components, in which the first principal component accounts for most of the variability of the data (Jolliffe 2002). Thus, we used this method to obtain factor scores for both trust in government and trust in religion. The original question in the questionnaire was worded as follows: “How much do you trust people/institutions listed below?” Respondents were asked to choose a score to represent the degree of trust, from 1 to 5 where 1 = completely distrust and 5 = completely trust. The list included the court/judicial system, central government, local government, army, police, central media, local media, civil organizations, companies/enterprises, National People’s Congress, and schools and education system; religious organizations and religious believers; family, relatives, colleagues, and so on.

The PCA results suggested four components, which may be labelled as trust in government, trust in religion, trust in relatives/friends, and trust in companies. In this project, we focus on trust in government and trust in religion by testing two sets of models (see Table 1).

Table 1. Factor analysis of trust index.

Trust Index	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Family members	0.251	0.432	−0.261	0.150
Relatives	0.279	0.707	0.013	0.175
Friends	0.189	0.789	0.210	0.148
Colleagues	0.228	0.781	0.356	0.101
Leaders/cadres	0.387	0.564	0.569	0.076
Businessmen	0.145	0.457	0.591	0.153
Classmates	0.180	0.709	0.308	0.127
Fellow-villagers	0.278	0.695	0.369	0.125
Religious believers	−0.054	0.196	0.196	0.866
Court/judicial system	0.739	0.234	0.381	0.032
Central government	0.810	0.214	0.115	−0.011
Local government	0.663	0.286	0.502	0.128
Army	0.771	0.231	0.099	0.010
Public security	0.778	0.248	0.421	0.040
Central media	0.773	0.229	0.302	0.022

Table 1. Cont.

Trust Index	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Local media	0.677	0.246	0.567	0.108
Civil organizations	0.321	0.228	0.671	0.354
Companies/enterprises	0.357	0.277	0.712	0.195
National People's Congress	0.788	0.218	0.123	−0.010
Religious organizations	0.072	0.117	0.283	0.887
Schools and education system	0.635	0.255	0.275	−0.010

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization; Total Variance Explained: 58%; Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's Test: 0.89 ($p < 0.01$). The test justified there is a certain redundancy between the variables that we can summarize with four factors; The "Bold" shows the variables with the strongest association to each component.

3.2. Independent Variables

The primary independent variable is educational attainment. In the survey, respondents were asked about the highest degree they had obtained so far. Responses were coded as follows: 1 = primary school, 2 = middle school, 3 = high school (including technical senior school and vocational school), 4 = junior college, 5 = university degree, 6 = graduate school. Note that respondents who had never received formal education were coded as 1, indicating the lowest level of education. The mean level of education of all respondents was 2.23, slightly above middle school. Education was treated as a categorical variable in all models in order to help understand the progressive effect of Marxism education and trust in religion and in government.

In order to examine the net effect of education on trust towards religion and government, we controlled for several demographic variables, including age, gender (male = 1, female = 0), place of residence¹ (urban = 1, rural = 0), party membership (CCP member = 1, non-member = 0), and income. Given the fact that China has gone through rapid societal and political changes over the past few decades, such as the Cultural Revolution and the transition to a market economy, it is important to control for the cohort effect in order to assess loyalty to the Party. Therefore, age was coded into generation. We classified each respondent according to his/her year of birth and created five generational cohorts, where 1 = 1940s, 2 = 1950s, 3 = 1960s, 4 = 1970s, and 5 = 1980s/1990s. As for income, we took the natural log of income for its skewedness of distribution. We also controlled for the effect of the main news source for its influence on trust in government (Schoon et al. 2010; Schoon and Cheng 2011). Internet as the main news source was coded as a dummy variable (internet = 1, TV and other media = 0). The survey asked about the religious beliefs of respondents, and we coded belief in any religion = 1, otherwise = 0. In this article, we regressed trust in government and trust in religion separately against education using the same set of controls, in the hope of elucidating the dynamic relationship between education and trust in an authoritative context.

Table 2 presents a summary of the statistics for all control variables. The total number of observations was equal to 9178 after a list-wise deletion of missing values. Approximately half of the sample was female, and 61.2% of the sample were urban residents, living in cities. Furthermore, 13.2% of all respondents were CCP members, and 12.7% chose internet as their main news source. As for education, there were approximately 36% of respondents with primary education or below, about 30% with a middle school education, 20% with high school education, 8% with a senior college degree and about 7% with a university degree. Only 0.8% of respondents went to graduate school.

¹ In this study, the place of residence refers to the area the respondent lives, urban or rural. We did not use household registration because people with rural *hukou* may live in the city as migrant workers or students.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
CCP membership		
Yes	1214.00	13.2
No	7964.00	86.8
Total	9178.00	100
Education		
Primary School or Below	3131.00	34.1
Middle School	2846.00	31
High School	1820.00	19.8
Senior College	730	8
University Degree	578	6.3
Graduate School	73	0.8
Total	9178.00	100
Age cohort		
1940s	1846.00	20.1
1950s	1817.00	19.8
1960s	2193.00	23.9
1970s	1882.00	20.5
1980s/90s	1440.00	15.7
Total	9178.00	100
Place of residence		
Urban	5616.00	61.2
Rural	3562.00	38.8
Total	9178.00	100
Gender		
Male	4530.00	49.4
Female	4648.00	50.6
Total	9178.00	100
News Resource		
TV and Other	8013.00	87.3
Internet	1165.00	12.7
Total	9178.00	100
Religious belief		
Non-Religious	8043.00	87.63
Religious	1135.00	12.37
Total	9178.00	100

4. Results

Before we obtained the factor scores from the group of questions about trust in religion and trust in government, we first compared their overall sum index. The comparison reveals that the general public is much more trustful of the government than of religion. The average score of trust in the government and governmental institutions was 4.0, whereas the average score of trust in religion and religious organizations was 2.6, suggesting that there is a relatively distrustful environment for religion and religious organizations in Chinese society. The comparison suggests that the dominant ideological indoctrination against religion appears effective to a significant extent.

Table 3 presents the ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regression results for all respondents on trust in government. The regression results showed several interesting findings. The first model (Model 1) included only the education predictor, and shows that the attainment of education is significantly and negatively related to trust in government ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that individuals

with more exposure to ideological education express less trust towards the government. Model 2 included all the control variables and education as the predictor. First of all, there is no gender difference in terms of trust in government after controlling for all other variables. CCP members trust the government significantly more than non-members do. Logged household income is negatively associated with trust in government, which means that richer people trust the government less. Generation is significantly associated with trust in government. On average, older generations tend to trust the government more in comparison to younger generations. Rural citizens trust the government less than urban citizens do. Individuals with internet as their major news source have significantly lower trust in government compared with others who obtain news from various other sources such as television, radio, and newspapers, after controlling for all other predictors. Being religious or not does not influence one’s trust in government. With these control variables, the effect size of education on trust in government shrinks a little, but remains strong ($p < 0.001$). For example, people with graduate school education have 0.66 units less trust in government compared with people with primary school education.

Table 3. ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models of trust in government and trust in religion.

Regression Models	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	<i>Trust in Government</i>		<i>Trust in Religion</i>	
Constant	0.307 *** (0.0171)	1.018 *** (0.108)	−0.117 *** (0.0179)	−0.339 ** (0.107)
Education (ref: primary school)				
Middle School	−0.274 *** (0.0248)	−0.144 *** (0.0267)	0.0482 (0.0259)	0.0699 ** (0.0267)
High School	−0.440 *** (0.0283)	−0.225 *** (0.0321)	0.141 *** (0.0295)	0.124 *** (0.0321)
Senior College	−0.567 *** (0.0394)	−0.248 *** (0.0464)	0.388 *** (0.0411)	0.337 *** (0.0463)
University Degree	−0.768 *** (0.0434)	−0.395 *** (0.0527)	0.393 *** (0.0453)	0.354 *** (0.0526)
Graduate School	−1.101 *** (0.114)	−0.660 *** (0.118)	0.569 *** (0.119)	0.520 *** (0.118)
CCP member (1 = yes)		0.142 *** (0.0324)		−0.00905 (0.0323)
Logged income		−0.0572 *** (0.0112)		0.00686 (0.0112)
Age cohort (ref: 1940s)				
1950s		−0.101 ** (0.0318)		−0.0461 (0.0317)
1960s		−0.111 *** (0.0313)		−0.0720 * (0.0312)
1970s		−0.173 *** (0.0331)		−0.109 *** (0.0330)
1980s/1990s		−0.191 *** (0.0381)		−0.107 ** (0.0380)
Gender (1 = male)		0.00925 (0.0203)		−0.0597 ** (0.0203)
Place of residence (1 = rural)		−0.242 *** (0.0234)		0.188 *** (0.0233)
News Resource (1 = internet)		−0.234 *** (0.0359)		0.130 *** (0.0358)
Religious (1 = yes)		−0.00881 (0.0302)		0.973 *** (0.0301)
N	9178	9178	9178	9178

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

Model 3 estimated the relationship between education and trust in religion, and shows that education is significantly, positively related to trust in religion. On average, a higher level of education predicts more trust in religion ($p < 0.001$). Yet, there is no statistical difference between individuals of middle school education and those of primary school education in terms of trust in religion. Model 4 included all control variables with education as the predictor. CCP membership is not significantly related to trust in religion, neither is logged household income after controlling control for all other variables. Compared with rural residents, urban people have less trust in religion. Women have a higher level of trust in religion relative to men. Religious people are more trusting towards religion than non-believers. What is interesting, is that there is no consistent linear effect of generation on trust in religion. Individuals who were born in the 1940s have the highest trust in religion among all generations, whereas individuals born in the 1970s have the lowest trust in religion. Indicating internet as their main news source predicts higher level of trust in religion relative to other news sources such as watching TV or listening to the radio. The effect of education on trust in religion remains strong and positive after controlling for all other variables ($p < 0.001$). All levels of education are statistically significant. People with a higher level of education tend to trust religion more. For example, individuals with graduate school education, on average, have 0.52 units more trust in religion than those with primary school education. This is the most surprising finding.

We hypothesized that education fosters loyalty in the government, while promoting distrust in religion at the same time. However, the OLS regression results show that education is not fulfilling its twofold tasks, but working to do the opposite. First, education has contrasting effects on trust in religion and trust in government after controlling for all other variables. Graduate school education predicts 0.66 units less trust in government, and 0.52s unit more trust in religion. The significant linear effect of education indicates that more exposure to ideological education actually predicts less trust in the party-state, while predicting greater trust in religion. It is also interesting that CCP membership does not predict statistically significant less trust in religion.

The explanation that the more educated and better-off tend to support the current government does not hold true for the case of China (Schoon and Cheng 2011). Household income is positively associated with trust in religion, while it is negatively associated with trust in government. The more privileged people, in general, do not trust the government more. Instead, they tend to trust religion more. Perhaps the idea of Deary et al. (2008), that the more educated they are, the more people favour democratic government, holds true for the case of China, where a higher level of education predicts more trust in religion but less trust in government.

Note that other demographical predictors also have contrasting effects on trust in government and trust in religion. For example, individuals with internet as their main news source tend to have more trust in religion and less trust in government compared with TV users. Party membership predicts higher trust in government compared with non-members. However, the affiliation with the party does not ensure a more negative attitude toward religion. These contrasting effects of demographics on trust in religion and trust in government inform the complexity of the associations among education, trust in government, and trust in religion.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

It is true that, in China, the overall trust in religion is much lower relative to trust in government. However, higher education predicts less trust in government and more trust in religion. This is especially interesting because other studies find that, in Western societies, higher education is associated with a skeptical attitude towards religion. In the case of China, however, it seems that higher education is associated with an increasing level of skeptical attitude towards the government. These findings are somewhat surprising for that education in China is designed to instill an appreciation for the party-state; love for the party and the country (Liu 2012).

Some limitations of this study need to be mentioned. First, the data employed are cross-sectional, thus definitive statements about causal relationships between education and trust in government or

in religion cannot be made. Second, our analyses suggest that higher education is associated with lower trust in government. Yet, it is likely that not education per se, but the incessant ideological indoctrination by Chinese government turns out to be counterproductive. Our study did not differentiate the two, but took them as similar factors. In future research, comparative studies are needed to look into the relationship between education and ideological introduction, and assess their independent influences on trust in government.

Our goal is to assess how education in China is fulfilling its twofold task. By comparing the effects of education on trust in government and trust in religion, we have found education is not producing the result intended by the party-state. Our findings suggest the complexity in the mechanism of trust in China. In fact, religion and trust, respectively, are complex concepts with a variety of understandings. This study did not define the two terms, but made them open to interpretation. The CGSS questionnaire did not provide any explanation when asking questions about religion (宗教) and trust (信任). Our analyses reveal a meaningful finding and serves as a mere beginning of this exploration. We hope that more in-depth study can better explain the relationship between religion and trust in the context of China. Future research needs to disentangle the influence of education on trust in government and in religion.

Author Contributions: Ying Xie, and Fenggang Yang conceived and designed the research. Ying Xie and Yunping Tong collected and analysed the data. Yunping Tong and Ying Xie wrote the manuscript. Fenggang Yang directed the whole paper writing.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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