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Featured Review Exchange

***Religion and Authoritarianism: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Consequences*. By Karrie J. Koesel. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014**

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In *Religion and Authoritarianism*, Karrie Koesel dives deep inside the two largest, most important, and understudied authoritarian regimes on the planet, Russia and China, and charts out the interplay between religious and political elites in each. In doing so, the book makes important and refreshing contributions to the study of authoritarianism and to the study of religion and politics.

Adopting a rational-actor approach to religious-political interactions and drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, Koesel highlights the surprising levels of cooperation, alliances, and mutually beneficial relationships across four very different-looking cities in China and Russia. An intensely felt combination of uncertainty, mutual needs, and resources, she argues, tends to lead local politicians and religious elites to bargain and deal with one another in materially beneficial and strategic ways. Koesel's detailed fieldwork teaches us much about how, exactly, authoritarian regimes interact with their citizens, struggle for legitimacy, deal with potential religious rivals, seek short-run goals, and thereby continue to evolve their own capacities to survive and even flourish. She also draws our attention to the resources and material interests that religious elites bring to the bargaining table with local state actors, especially when it comes to faith-based tourism and the religious-run real estate business. By cooperating with the state, religious elites enable authoritarian regimes to upgrade their authoritarianism and stabilize rather than challenge authoritarian rule.

Koesel's approach yields important insights: for instance, her fieldwork in China suggests that the slow liberalization of China's religious market that we observe today has had much to do with the financial success of religious Chinese business entrepreneurs, including, importantly, what might be aptly described as China's new Christian bourgeoisie. Her research in China also reveals a strong, shared sentiment among China's unregistered church members of their immense patriotic and civic loyalty to the Chinese state. Together with the Christian bourgeoisie, these politically repressed church members represent what would seem to be an unlikely vanguard of political loyalty and civic activism available to the Chinese state today.

One of the strengths of *Religion and Authoritarianism* is its ability to put the authoritarian regimes of China and Russia into comparative perspective and to begin to uncover the veil of religion-state interactions within. This comparison is so refreshing and welcome because it is so rare and difficult, and it opens up new perspectives on current comparative scholarship on religion and politics, which remains largely consumed by the crises of religion and power in the Middle East, on the one hand, and the evolution of religion in the public sphere in the West, on the other. Koesel's research on Russia and China, therefore, forces scholars to re-examine some of the assumptions they make about contemporary religion and politics.

One of the characteristics that makes China and Russia so different from the other places in which we tend to study religion and politics today is that both states are *Great Powers* who are not (China) or no longer (Russia) interested in constructing either a liberal democratic order (and all that might imply for religious freedom) or a classical communist one (and all that might imply for religious restrictions). In highlighting this return of religion to authoritarian Great Power politics, Koesel's study also highlights the continued importance of *non-transnational religions* to the study of the state. An enormous amount of important scholarship on religion and politics, from Samuel Huntington onward, has interrogated the extent to which transnational religions — the global umma or the Catholic Church — have been capable of drawing on their global networks, resources, and identities and have resurged in an age of globalization to challenge, reshape or even replace the rigidities of the secular and sovereign nation-state.

Koesel's book tells a different story. Although she argues that one of the goals of the book is to highlight the multi-religious nature of interactions between religious and political elites in China and Russia, in which elite actors prize good deals wrought over material resources, a clear pattern of winners and losers emerge. In both China and Russia, political elites choose to do deals with religious elites who have a combination of beneficial material resources and a useful national past or a promising national future. Koesel refers to these later, immaterial resources as the advantages held by "insider" religions. Russia clearly constructs its religious policies around the Russian Orthodox Church; China finds it easier to deal with religious claims from Buddhist and Taoist communities and from folk religions. These immaterial resources that religious communities possess appear to dominate and shape regime strategies for dealing with them at least as much, if not more so, than the material exchanges which Koesel prizes.

In this light it is little wonder that, conspicuously, despite its material resources, the Catholic Church is marginalized in both countries. Given their post-Vatican II preference for human rights, democracy and internationalism, it would be difficult for China or Russia to not see the Catholic Church as a political threat. Muslim communities, who have identified with the politics of international Islamist trends, as some have in Chechnya, also pose a threat. On account of both their transnational institutional natures and their political theologies, these Catholic and Muslim communities challenge the Chinese and Russian regimes, and they suffer grinding repression as a result. This does not mean that Christians or Muslims are unable to cooperate with authoritarian states. But the Muslim communities and Christian Churches that Russia and China do business with are either nationalized, historical ethnic communities (as the Muslim community in Russia's Tartarstan) or nationalized, patriotic communities with little to no foreign ties (as the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement in China).

In this regard, Koesel's analysis illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of the rational strategic actor approach to religion and politics: through it she is able to unearth the important material interactions between religious and political elites, yet in doing so she also under-evaluates the ideational motivations for and consequences of the deals struck between them.

This brings me to my first comment about the role of ideology in Koesel's cases. From a distance, for a scholar who is neither an expert on China nor Russia, Koesel appears to illustrate how two great power states are essentially (re)constructing national religions as essential organizing principles of society and politics in a post-communist, illiberal political order. The book reads like a telling manual detailing the mechanics of this project in which the state builds (almost from scratch) a new religious political administration. Her examples recall other scholars' recent work on the religious politics of empires (see, e.g., Karen Barkey's *Empire of difference: The Ottomans in comparative perspective*), where rulers often found it convenient to rule multi-ethnic polities indirectly, through religious communities. In a similar way, these examples also recall recent work on the future possibilities of post-Westphalian politics, in which religious communities (if not civilizations) play a more central role in the organization of society and politics (e.g., *Civilizations in world politics*, ed. Peter Katzenstein, and *Civilizational dialogue and world order*, eds. Michális S. Michael and Fabio F. Petito).

Some of the most fascinating passages of the book draw these possibilities out, particularly in Russia, where the central state and local governments have begun to outsource not just political legitimacy but also political administration to the Orthodox Church. In the city of Nizhny Novgorod, she writes, local priests essentially decide permits for new religious buildings and leases; the Russian Orthodox Church has successfully introduced a new religious curriculum for public schools; and each of these developments endows Orthodox elites with real political and social authority over their communities and Russian citizens. These collaborations often occur, as Koesel helpfully points out, in ad hoc, informal ways, mediated by local political actors, but they add up to a new institutionalization of religious authority within society with potentially vast consequences on the idea and identity of Russian society. While this process is less evident in China, the micro-economics of religion and state in the cities on which the book focuses give evidence of a similar willingness of the Chinese state to exploit the possibilities of nationally-bound religious groups to build up a new idea of nation for its own state-building purposes.

In both Russia and China, therefore, we see ample evidence of religious nation-building that recalls an important debate within political science about the role of religion in the future of great power, post-Westphalian politics.

This leads me to my second comment, which is about sociology. My suspicion, only reinforced by my reading of Koesel's book, is that while China and Russia are actively engaged in an important project of religious nation-building, that project's end result will look dramatically different from earlier models of religious empire or civilization, including the historical precedents that Russia and, to some extent, China, already possess. One important reason for this has to do with the religious (or unreligious) nature of the societies that these religious and political elites interact with. What data we have available confirms that no matter what sort of religious revival either China or Russia might be experiencing, both societies remain among the most secularized in the world, particularly when it comes to regular participation in religious services. The bargains made between religious and political elites cannot be understood in isolation from this relationship of those elites to society itself. The real reach of religious authority in either country reflects society's own reception and conceptualization of religion and is only as thick as the people can recognize or accept. And here is my parting suggestion to Koesel and much mainstream religion and politics scholarship, which is to reinvigorate a study of the people in the pews (and on the prayer rugs) into the analysis. We can arrive at a fuller grasp of the religious power of the authoritarian state and the political authority of religious communities by understanding their relationship to the complex configurations of religious belief and participation in contemporary societies.

***Religion and Democratization: Framing Religious and Political Identities in Muslim and Catholic Societies*. By Michael D. Driessen. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014. 338pp. $74.00 cloth**

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In spite of the abundance of scholarship on transitions from authoritarian rule, the role of religion and religious actors in democratization processes tends to be overlooked. This may be because secularization and political liberalization are generally seen to be moving in tandem, the separation of religion and state is assumed to be central to the democratic project, or some religions are thought to derail democratic transitions because they embody authoritarian norms and practices such as institutionalized hierarchy and inequality. Michael D. Driessen's *Religion and*