

Two Trends for Religions in China According to the State

In 2017 religions in China faced a growing scrutiny by the Communist Party and the Chinese Government. Both regard religions' impact on society and their potential foreign connections as problematic. Two priorities have been proposed: *sinicization* and *politicization*.

During the year, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) organized various seminars and training courses for religious leaders both in Beijing and across the country, to promote the sinicization of religions.

Professor Zhang Zhigang, Head of Peking University's Institute of Religion and Culture, and Vice President of Society of Chinese Religions, provides the "theoretical basis" for the sinicization of religion. According to him, religious sinicization requires actually accomplishing the "three-fold assimilation": assimilation into Chinese culture, into Chinese nationality, and into Chinese society, in other words, religion should have "cultural identity, national identity, and societal identity," and among these, "cultural identity" is the most basic (cited by *China Source*, December 5, 2017; <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinese-church-voices/the-sinicization-of-religion>)

Only when truly rooted in the soil of Chinese culture will Chinese Christianity have a future. That is to say, we must oppose "evangelistic activities" or "churches" that have tendencies toward colonialism or imperialism; we must oppose the Westernization of China; we must oppose Christianity that is imported missionary-style; we must oppose the direct translation of Western theology to a Chinese mindset. Instead, we should contemplate and practice the Christian faith within China, so that we can merge its values with our national culture and benefit human living. All this should be accomplished within an independent church, as appropriate in the current conditions of Chinese society and culture. This independent church should be able to "self-support, self-govern, and self-propagate."

Wang Zuo'an, the director of SARA, the religious work must "deal with politics, and remain politically vigilant" in order to "build up positive and healthy religious relations."

At present in our nation, the relations between religions and the government refer mainly to the relations of religions with the party and the government. The leadership of the Communist Party is the essential characteristic of Socialism with Chinese characteristics. Consequently, managing the relations between religions and the government requires firmly holding onto and keeping the guidance of the Party, consolidating the rule of the Party, strengthening the foundation of its rule.... Religions must obey the laws and regulations of the nation, as well as its religious policies, must accept the legal administration by the government, carry on only lawful religious activities, manage the religious affairs in an autonomous way, but they cannot in any way interfere in the practice of state functions in the administrative sphere, in the judicial sector and in education. The separation between state and religion does not mean mutual insulation; in fact complete separation is impossible. Our party takes care of the relations with the religious circle, following the principle of "unity and cooperation on the political level; mutual respect on the faith level." We must guide the religious circles and the masses of believers to

*support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, to cherish the socialist system, to persevere on the road of the Socialism with Chinese characteristics.*¹

Brent Fulton (in “China and the Church: 5 Trends to Watch in 2018,” *ChinaSource*, January 3, 2018) foresees the same trend for 2018:

While many developments within the church itself would seem to bode well for the future, 2018 finds China’s church potentially on a collision course with the current regime, as China’s leaders tighten their grip on all sectors of society, including religion. How the church weathers the uncertain days ahead will depend on a number of factors.

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¹ Wang Zuo’an (王作安), “Build a Positive and Healthy Relationship among Religions” (《构建积极健康的宗教关系》) in *Zhongguo zongjiao* (中国宗教), 2017, 3, pp. 6-8.