

**CHINA'S REGULATION OF RELIGION
IN A CHANGING CONTEXT**

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EAI Background Brief No. 369

Date of Publication: 1 February 2008

Executive Summary

1. China has become more tolerant of religion since the early 1980s, shifting away from decades of repression. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has realized that wherever possible, it should try not to make an enemy of the forces of religion.
2. Among the five officially recognized faiths, the CCP is less skeptical of Taoism, which is of Chinese origin, and Buddhism, which has been in China for more than 2,000 years. China's tolerance of Buddhism is further boosted by the need to neutralize the global appeal of the Dalai Lama and his association with Tibetan separatism.
3. Between the two major Christian faiths, the CCP prefers Protestantism to the highly organized Catholicism. It does not recognize the Holy See and the pope's power to appoint bishops, which is seen as interference in domestic affairs. However, with the Vatican willing to drop its recognition of Taiwan, recent years have seen the two sides mending ties.
4. Interestingly, the authorities recognize Islam as an authentic Chinese religion with its roots established since the Tang dynasty. Islam embraced by the Uyghur remains heavily regulated in Xinjiang, but the religion is not considered a political threat in other parts of China, especially those embraced by the Hui ethnic group.
5. Externally, tolerance of religion is important for China to improve or maintain its good relations with other countries and the global religious community at large. For that purpose, China hosted the first World Buddhist Forum in April 2006 and the "International Forum on the Tao Te Ching" in December 2006.
6. With the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in central Asia, China clearly sees the need to sustain the loyalty of Chinese Muslims while isolating and containing

Turkic separatists in Xinjiang. It continues to seek friendly relations with the majority of Muslim countries.

7. Domestically, open participation in religion demands groups to register under the state's "patriotic national associations" and subjecting believers to close monitoring while compromising religious freedom in exchange. Many chose to go underground to avoid the infiltration of state propaganda, the possibility of an ideological clash, and to preserve their own authentic faiths and beliefs.
8. China is clearly heading toward a more religious society. Domestic religious revival, coupled with external pressure such as the global rise of religious fundamentalism and international charges against China for violating human rights and freedom, has made the CCP more tolerant of religion that is above ground and subject to government oversight.
9. Overall, the Chinese leadership's concession for religious practices hinges on patriotism as a primal precondition to all religious beliefs, and so long as religion could facilitate state interests. Nonetheless, the CCP's bottom line is that national interests and its authority should not be overridden by doctrinal ones.