

Freedom of Religious Belief in Xinjiang

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Contents

Foreword

I. History of Religions in Xinjiang

II. Protecting Citizens' Freedom of Religious Belief

III. Satisfying Believers' Normal Religious Requirements

IV. Managing Religious Affairs in Accordance with the Law

V. International Religious Exchanges

VI. Preventing and Combating Religious Extremism

VII. Active Role of Religious Circles

Conclusion

Foreword

The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang for short) is located in northwest China. For thousands of years it has been a multi-ethnic region of multiple religions. At present, the major religions in Xinjiang are Islam, Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism and Taoism.

Historically, religious relations in Xinjiang were very complicated. Before the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949 many conflicts had occurred between different religions or different sects of the same religion; some areas even experienced decades of religious wars and centuries of sectarian strife.

Religious wars and conflicts not only caused serious damage to the economy and society, but also brought grave disasters to the people. As a result, people lost freedom of faith.

After the People's Republic of China was founded, people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang gained the freedom of religious belief. The central government and local governments at all levels of Xinjiang have fully implemented the system of regional ethnic autonomy and the policy on the freedom of religious belief, and constantly improved laws and regulations on the administration of religious affairs. All religions in Xinjiang have thus reached a new historical stage at which they coexist in harmony.

To let the peoples of the rest of the world know the real situation of religious freedom in Xinjiang, this paper hereby makes a brief introduction and explanation.

I. History of Religions in Xinjiang

The evolution of religions in Xinjiang was a long historical process. The ancient residents of Xinjiang developed primitive religious ideas as early as in the Neolithic Period. From the fourth century BC, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and some other faiths were introduced into Xinjiang one after another. Gradually there came into being a pattern wherein a variety of religions coexisted, which continues today.

The evolution of religions in Xinjiang went through four stages: the stage of primitive religion, the formation stage for the coexistence of a variety of religions with Buddhism as the major one, the evolution stage for the coexistence of many religions with Islam and Buddhism as the two major ones, and the development stage for the coexistence of a variety of religions with Islam as the major one.

Before the fourth century BC primitive religion was practiced in Xinjiang. Many ethnic groups of Xinjiang still retain some concepts and practices of primitive religion to different degrees. Later, Zoroastrianism was introduced into Xinjiang via Central Asia. Around the first century BC Buddhism was introduced into Xinjiang, and gradually a pattern came into being wherein many religions coexisted with Buddhism as the major one. From the fourth to the 10th century Zoroastrianism became prevalent throughout Xinjiang, particularly in the Turpan area. For this, the local authorities of Gaochang set up a special administrative

agency. During this same period Buddhism reached its peak. In oases on the periphery of the Tarim Basin Buddhist temples arose in great numbers, with a multitude of monks and nuns. Khotan, Kashgar (Shule), Kucha (Qiuci), Gaochang and other famous Buddhist centers took shape. Taoism was introduced into Xinjiang around the fifth century, becoming prevalent mainly in Turpan and Kumul (Hami). It spread to most parts of Xinjiang in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Manichaeism and Nestorianism were introduced into Xinjiang one after the other in the sixth century. In the middle of the ninth century, the Huihu people, who believed in Manichaeism, entered the Turpan area, where they built temples, dug caves, translated scriptures and painted frescoes. From the 10th to the 14th century, Nestorianism flourished as the Huihu people and some other ethnic peoples converted to it in many parts of Xinjiang. At that time Nestorianism was preached in Kashgar, Yarkant, Khotan, Bugur (Luntai), Gaochang, Hami, Almaliq (now in Huocheng County), and a few other places.

In the late ninth and early 10th centuries, Islam was introduced into southern Xinjiang, changing the religious pattern of Xinjiang again. After the Kara-Khanid Khanate accepted Islam, in the mid-10th century it launched a religious war against the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan, which lasted more than 40 years. In the early 11th century the Kara-Khanid Khanate conquered Khotan and imposed Islam in that region. Thereafter, Islam dominated southern Xinjiang while Buddhism dominated northern Xinjiang, the two coexisting. In the early period of this stage Zoroastrianism, Nestorianism and Manichaeism were also very popular. But with the spread of Islam, these religions gradually declined.

The rulers of the Eastern Chagatai Khanate in the mid-14th century spread Islam to the northern edge of the Tarim Basin, Turpan Basin and Hami area by warlike and other compulsory means. By the early 16th century many religions coexisted in Xinjiang, with Islam as the predominant one. Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Nestorianism gradually disappeared, although Buddhism and Taoism clung on. In the early 17th century the Oirat Mongols accepted Tibetan Buddhism. Beginning in the 18th century, Protestantism, Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church were introduced into Xinjiang one by one. A pattern featuring coexistence of multiple religions, with Islam as the principal one, continues today in Xinjiang.

The religious history of Xinjiang shows that coexistence of multiple religions with one or two dominant was a basic characteristic, and blending and coexistence made up the mainstream religious relationships of Xinjiang. A religion should

adapt itself to the times and human environment, and achieve localization, so that it can continue. History shows that wars between different religions and disputes between different sects of the same religion deprive people of the free choice of religion.

II. Protecting Citizens' Freedom of Religious Belief

Respect for and protection of freedom of religious belief is a long-term basic national policy of the Chinese government. The Constitution of the People's Republic of China clearly stipulates: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief." "No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion." "The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state."

The Regulations on Religious Affairs promulgated by the State Council of the People's Republic of China, and the Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Religious Affairs promulgated by the local government of Xinjiang both reflect the above principles of the Constitution that "citizens enjoy freedom of religious belief" and that "the state protects normal religious activities." It is a completely independent choice of citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion. No organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. No citizen suffers discrimination or unfair treatment for believing in, or not believing in, any religion. Relevant rules and regulations of Xinjiang also have provisions on religious groups, venues for religious activities, clerical personnel, religious activities, religious property and related matters. Citizens' freedom of religious belief and their obligations are unified; citizens who believe in or do not believe in any religion must fulfill the obligations prescribed by the Constitution and the law. Anyone who infringes upon citizens' freedom of religious belief shall bear the corresponding legal liability.

The law protects normal religious activities. All normal religious activities, including attending religious services, fasting, worshiping Buddha, praying, preaching, reciting scriptures, burning incense, attending Mass, being baptized or

ordained, observing extreme unction, holding memorial ceremonies, and celebrating religious festivals, that believers conduct at venues for religious activities or in their own homes in accordance with customary religious practices, are exclusive affairs of religious groups and the believers themselves. These activities are protected by law, and no organization or individual may interfere with them. To ensure successful pilgrimages for believers in Islam, Xinjiang adopts a policy of organized and planned pilgrimages. Since 1996 the Xinjiang government has arranged charter flights every year to take believers in Islam to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The Xinjiang government funds medical care and interpretation for pilgrims, and offers other services to ensure safe and orderly pilgrimages.

Citizens' religious feelings and needs are fully respected. During the holy Islamic month of Ramadan whether to close or open halal (Muslim food) restaurants is completely determined by the owners themselves without interference. There are mosques with a tradition of having iftar (the evening meal when Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset) and a number of religious believers provide free iftar to fasting people. Local governments ensure that all religious activities during Ramadan go on in an orderly manner. On July 3, 2015, during Ramadan, a 6.5-magnitude earthquake occurred in Hotan Prefecture. The government carried out rescue work while at the same time promptly setting up temporary sites to ensure prayer, fasting and other normal religious life for religious believers in the disaster-hit areas. On the evening of July 17 (the eve of Eid al-Fitr, festival of breaking of the fast), principal Party and government leaders of Xinjiang had iftar with Islamic personages and Muslim representatives of all ethnic groups to welcome Eid al-Fitr, attracting wide attention and praise from all sectors of society.

The customs of religious believers are fully respected. State laws, including the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, Criminal Law, General Principles of the Civil Law, Education Law, Labor Law, and Advertising Law, and local regulations, including the Regulations of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Administration of Muslim Food and the Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on the Work of Ethnic Unity and Progress contain specific provisions on the protection of religious customs, including production, processing, storage, distribution and selling of halal food, supply of special food, setting up of halal restaurants and halal canteens. During the Spring Festival, Eid al-Adha (Corban Festival), Eid al-Fitr and other major traditional festivals, all ethnic groups can enjoy statutory holidays and be supplied with special foodstuffs. Special cemetery areas are allocated for some ethnic-minority groups who traditionally bury their dead in the ground. Traditional practices of a religious nature, such as naming a child, funeral pray, burial, and holding Nazer (memorial

activities), are respected.

Religious and cultural heritages are effectively protected. A total of 109 religious and cultural sites in Xinjiang, including Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar, Shengyou Lamasery in Zhaosu and the Kizil Grottoes, have been designated as cultural relics sites under the protection of the autonomous region and the state. Among the 109 sites, 46 are key cultural relics sites under the protection of the state, and 63 are under the protection of the autonomous region. The central government has allocated special funds to renovate cultural relic protection sites at the state and autonomous-region levels, including the Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar, Baytulla Mosque in Yining, Jiaman Mosque in Hotan, Yanghang Mosque in Urumqi and the Tomb of the Fragrant Imperial Concubine (Apak Hoja Mazzar) in Kashgar. The Xinjiang government has funded the renovation and repair of 28 temples, including Sulayman' s Minaret in Turpan and Shengyou Lamasery in Zhaosu. Many ancient religious books, including the Biography of the Prophet (Qissasul anbiya), Volume II of the Golden Light Sutra (Suvar aprabhasa Sutra), and Maitrisimit Nom Bitig, have been included in the Catalog of National Rare Books of China. Special funds have been allocated to protect and edit some books, such as the Koran and The Prophet Muhammad: A Biography, which have been passed down from history. Intangible cultural heritage items relating to religion are also under effective protection and inheritance.

Religious personages' right to participate in the deliberation and administration of state affairs is protected. People's congresses and committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) at all levels supervise and inspect the implementation of the policy of religious freedom and the enforcement of pertinent laws and regulations. Among people's congresses and the CPPCC committees at all levels, 1,436 religious believers from Xinjiang serve as deputies and members to fulfill the right to participate in the deliberation and administration of state affairs through the two organs, raising views and recommendations or submitting proposals and motions on government work, especially religious work.

III. Satisfying Believers' Normal Religious Requirements

The Xinjiang government attaches equal importance to administration and services. While legally administrating religious affairs, it endeavors to satisfy believers' normal religious requirements.

Xinjiang now has 24,800 venues for religious activities, including mosques, churches, lamaseries and temples, with 29,300 clerical personnel. Among these, 24,400 mosques have 29,000 clerical personnel; 59 Buddhist temples have 280 clerical personnel; one Taoist temple has one cleric; 227 Protestant churches (meeting grounds) have 26 clerical personnel; 26 Catholic churches (meeting grounds) have 27 clerical personnel; and three Orthodox churches (meeting grounds) have one cleric. There are eight religious colleges, including the Xinjiang Islamic Institute and Xinjiang Islamic School. There are also 112 religious organizations, among which, at the autonomous region level, there are two organizations, namely, an Islamic association with a committee for Islamic affairs, and a Buddhist association; at the level of prefectures and prefecture-level cities there are 14 Islamic associations, three Buddhist associations and one Protestant Three-self Patriotic Movement committee; and at the level of county and county-level cities there are 88 Islamic associations, two Buddhist associations and two Protestant Three-self Patriotic Movement committees.

The training of clerical personnel has been strengthened. Trainee clerical personnel study under clerical personnel, at scripture schools (classes or workshops), at colleges, and by other means. A training system has been established and improved to provide systematic training programs for in-service clerical personnel. Training courses on scripture interpretation or for people in charge of management and organization of venues for religious activities are run to enhance the level of self-management of religions organizations. Since 2001 the State Administration for Religious Affairs has held 12 training classes on Islamic scripture interpretation, training more than 500 clerical personnel for Xinjiang. The Xinjiang Buddhist Association holds regular training classes on Buddhist knowledge for clerical personnel. The government of Xinjiang regularly organizes clerical personnel to go to inland provinces for study and exchanges, so as to broaden their horizon and enhance their capabilities. The central government helps the Xinjiang Islamic Institute to extend buildings, improve the teaching conditions and expand enrollment.

Channels for believers to gain religious knowledge have been expanded. Religious classics and books have been translated and published, including the Koran and Selections from Al-Sahih Muhammad Ibn-Isma'il al-Bukhari, in the Uygur, Han Chinese, Kazak and Kirgiz languages. The New Collection of Waez's Speeches series and the magazine China's Muslims are compiled and published, with a total circulation of over 1.76 million. Religious classics on Buddhism and Christianity are published and distributed. From 2014 to 2015, Xinjiang has distributed 43 Islamic publications in different languages of minority ethnic groups,

totaling over one million copies, including over 230,000 copies of new Koran and over 29,000 copies of Basic Knowledge of Islam, both in the Uygur language. The China Islamic Association provides a Uygur-language version of its website. The Xinjiang Islamic Association publishes the magazine Xinjiang Muslims in the Uygur, Han Chinese and Kazak languages, providing free copies to mosques and clerical personnel. It has also opened the "Xinjiang Muslims" website in the Uygur and Han Chinese languages. Religious organizations hold training classes on religious knowledge and etiquette for believers.

IV. Managing Religious Affairs in Accordance with the Law

In accordance with laws and regulations and the principle of "protecting the legal, stopping the illegal, containing the extreme, resisting infiltration, and combating crimes," Xinjiang manages religious affairs, protects people's freedom of religious belief, and ensures that normal religious activities proceed in an orderly way.

Xinjiang has promulgated and amended a series of regulations, including the Provisional Regulations of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on the Administration of Sites for Religious Activities, the Provisional Regulations of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on the Administration of Religious Activities, the Provisional Regulations of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on the Administration of Religious Personnel and the Regulations of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Religious Affairs, which define the rights and obligations of religious organizations, venues for religious activities and religious personnel. Xinjiang will further improve its rules and regulations on the administration of religious affairs and the rule of law in its work in this regard.

Administrate venues for religious activities. Venues for religious activities in Xinjiang have to go through government registration formalities in accordance with the law before they get legal status. The government issues the land-use certificate, housing-ownership certificate and registration certificate for each such venue. The venues enjoy the right to establish democratic management organizations, manage their internal affairs, organize and conduct religious activities, receive donations, manage and use property, and initiate public welfare programs. The legitimate rights and interests of the venues are protected by law, and no infringement or intervention by any organization or individual is allowed. Anyone that enters the venues must follow the administration regulations and respect the religious personnel and believers. Through the administration of the

venues in accordance with the law and the self-management of religious believers, activities in the venues are held in a safe and orderly way, and the venues are properly managed and enjoy a clean environment.

Administrate religious activities. Normal religious activities in Xinjiang are protected by law. It is required that group activities of religious believers be carried out in lawfully registered venues. Religious activities must comply with the regular order of society, work and life, as well as the regulations governing public places. Religious organizations are responsible for coordinating internal religious affairs, and the government should not interfere.

Administrate clerical personnel. In accordance with laws, regulations and religious traditions, clerical personnel in Xinjiang enjoy the right to preside over religious activities and ceremonies, and may receive social and individual donations. No organization or individual other than a religious group is allowed to appoint, designate, employ, dismiss or replace religious personnel. Clerical personnel must fulfill their civic obligations, and uphold national unification, ethnic unity and social stability.

Regulate activities of administrative departments. In Xinjiang, religious affairs departments at the county level or above manage the religious affairs of their respective administrative regions in accordance with the law, and other administrative departments are in charge of administrative work related to religious affairs within their respective statutory duties. Relevant departments of the state and local government in Xinjiang provide training sessions for functionaries of religious affairs departments to improve their capabilities in administering religious affairs. Those who have violated the legitimate rights and interests of religious organizations, venues for religious activities or clerical personnel or believers will bear due legal responsibilities, and those who have committed crimes will be held criminally responsible. Standing committees of the people's congresses at all levels supervise the administration of religious affairs in accordance with the law.

Punish illegal behavior in the guise of religion. The Chinese government prohibits any organization or individual from splitting the country, disseminating extremist religious thoughts, inciting ethnic hatred, undermining national unity, disturbing the social order, or impairing citizens' physical and mental health in the name of religion. The government prohibits any act that impedes the implementation of the

systems of state administration, justice, education, culture, marriage, family planning or inheritance in the name of religion. It also prohibits behavior that violates national security and interests, public interests, and citizens' legitimate rights and interests in the name of religion. Judicial organs at all levels in Xinjiang combat criminal activities in the name of religion to better ensure the citizens' freedom of religious belief and normal religious activities. No Xinjiang citizen has been punished because of his or her rightful religious belief.

Attach equal importance to management and services. Relevant functional departments at governments at all levels in Xinjiang actively help religious circles solve practical difficulties and provide them with services. They help religious organizations and schools improve work and school conditions, eliminate all security risks of venues for religious activities, include clerical personnel in the social security system, and provide living allowances for disadvantaged clerical personnel on a regular basis.

Uphold principles of independence and self-management of China's religious undertakings. China's religious undertakings are run by religious groups, personnel or citizens, and its religious affairs or organizations are not subject to any foreign domination. Foreigners must abide by Chinese laws and regulations when participating in religious activities within Chinese territory and must not interfere in China's religious affairs. As a provincial-level administrative region of China, Xinjiang sticks to the principle of independence and self-management in terms of its religious affairs.

V. International Religious Exchanges

While adhering to the independence and self-management principle, Xinjiang engages in active communication and exchanges with other religious organizations worldwide on the basis of mutual respect, equality and friendship. Governments at all levels in Xinjiang and the Xinjiang people are open-minded and welcome all foreign religious organizations and individuals that respect China's sovereignty and the principle of independence and self-management of China's religious affairs.

Carry out religious academic and cultural exchanges. Representatives from Xinjiang religious circles have participated in many international academic meetings and seminars, and clerical personnel and students from religious

schools in Xinjiang have won prizes at many international Koran recitation contests, demonstrating the sound cultural and academic foundation of Xinjiang's religious circles.

Send people to study abroad. Since 2001 Xinjiang has sent more than 70 religious school students and clerical personnel to Egypt's Al-Azhar University, Pakistan's International Islamic University and other overseas colleges and universities for further study, with a view to improving their religious knowledge and teaching level. The government has visited the students and personnel many times, and established scholarships for them.

Promote "welcoming in" and "going global." Religious personnel and overseas Chinese from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other countries have been invited to Xinjiang and the inland areas of China. Foreign religious organizations and groups have also been invited to Xinjiang for friendly visits. The government in Xinjiang has organized the "China Xinjiang Culture Exchange Group" for exchanges with countries in the Middle East, Oceania, and Europe. Xinjiang religious delegations have visited Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Germany, Denmark and other countries many times, and participated in the "China Islamic Culture Expo & Art Show" held by the Islamic Association of China in Indonesia, Turkey and other countries, introducing to the international community, especially the Islamic world, Xinjiang's economic and social development, freedom of religious belief and other facts, and enhancing friendship and mutual understanding.

VI. Preventing and Combating Religious Extremism

Religious extremists, in the name of religion, spread radical and extremist views, and take extremist means to try to establish a theocracy. Religious extremism is not religion, but tries to make use of religion. It is by nature anti-human, anti-society, anti-civilization and anti-religion, and is an important ideological foundation for violent and terrorist activities. Since the Cold War religious extremism has become increasingly rampant in the international arena, frequently committing acts of terror and violence, for instance, the September 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., the November 13 terrorist attacks in France, and the March 22 terrorist attacks in Belgium. Those attacks have severely undermined world peace

and regional security, and become a malignant tumor in contemporary international society.

Affected by international religious extremism, religious extremism has grown and spread in Xinjiang in recent years. Religious extremism betrays and distorts religious doctrines, deludes and deceives the public, particularly young people, with their fallacies, and changes some people into extremists and terrorists completely under its control. Religious extremist forces have designed and carried out a series of severe violent and terrorist attacks in China, including a knife attack at a train station in Kunming on March 1, 2014, the May 22 bombing of a market in Urumqi in 2014, multiple attacks in Shanshan on June 26, 2013, attacks on July 28 in Shache in 2014, and the September 18 terrorist attacks in Baicheng in 2015, injuring or killing religious personnel and believers and other innocent people. Facts show that religious extremism has become a real danger that undermines national unity and ethnic solidarity, sabotages religious and social harmony, impairs social stability and peace in Xinjiang, and endangers the life and property of people of all ethnic groups.

Religious extremism is the common enemy of all humanity. It is the undeniable obligation of all countries and all peoples, including religious believers, to fight against religious extremism. Xinjiang has adopted a policy of "de-extremization" to prevent and combat religious extremism, which is a just act to safeguard the fundamental interests of the country and the people, as well as an important part of the battle of the world community against religious extremism.

Establish proper faith and conduct honest deeds. Xinjiang encourages religious organizations and believers to promote patriotism, peace, unity, moderation, tolerance and benevolence through their sermons and preaching, spread the Chinese cultural concepts of advising people to perform good deeds, teaching people morality and being merciful, and lead religious believers in maintaining proper faith and honest deeds, and resisting religious extremism.

Crack down on terrorism and extremism in accordance with the law. Xinjiang cracks down on the propaganda of terrorism and extremism and the incitement of terrorist and extremist activities in accordance with relevant laws and regulations, such as the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China and the Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China.

Uphold the role of modern civilization. Modern civilization leads the cultural development and prosperity of all ethnic groups, and active, healthy and enriched cultural activities meet the people's growing intellectual and cultural needs. Xinjiang takes active measures to make religions to adapt to socialist society, and prevents the use of religion in interfering in the administrative, judicial, educational and other social affairs.

Improve the people's well-being. Xinjiang facilitates its economic and social development, implements livelihood projects, promotes common progress and prosperity, improves the living standard, health care, education, employment and other social aspects of all ethnic groups, prevents the breeding of extremist thoughts, and consolidates the social foundation for resisting religious extremism.

Strengthen international cooperation. Xinjiang conducts activities for better understanding and promotion of the traditional friendship between China and other countries, promotes cooperation with related countries, and fights East Turkistan terrorist forces. It learns from the world community's experience in the prevention of the proliferation of religious extremism, "de-extremization" and the combat against cyber terrorism. It also actively participates in multilateral anti-terrorist cooperative mechanisms, conducts dialogues between different cultures and restricts the scope of religious extremism.

The "de-extremization" adopted by Xinjiang has effectively contained the spread of religious extremism, and made a great contribution to international "de-extremization," prevention of and combat against terrorism, and world peace and development.

VII. Active Role of Religious Circles

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 the policy of freedom of religious belief has been comprehensively implemented in Xinjiang, arousing the enthusiasm of religious circles in participating in economic and social construction. Since the initiation of the reform and opening-up era in 1978, and especially in recent years, progress has been made in all social undertakings in Xinjiang, and the autonomous region's comprehensive strength, rule of law and people's well-being. Great changes have taken place on both sides of the Tianshan Mountains. Religious circles have played an active role in maintaining Xinjiang's social stability and lasting peace, and promoting the comprehensive development of Xinjiang's economy and society.

Uphold national unity and ethnic solidarity. In China, the core of maintaining national unity and ethnic solidarity lies in anti-secessionist work. For a long time, Xinjiang religious circles have been enhancing the concept of the rule of law, abiding by laws and regulations, and fostering the national consciousness, civic awareness and sense of community of the Chinese nation. They have taken the lead in setting an example in the maintenance of national unity, in stopping words and deeds undermining national unity, and in publicizing local role models of national unity. They have striven to become fine examples of national unity, and have led religious believers in contributing to the Chinese Dream of rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Oppose religious extremism and safeguard social stability. Xinjiang religious circles, taking root in the local soil and culture, have furthered scripture study with Chinese characteristics, inherited and carried forward the fine traditions of patriotism, peace, unity, moderation, tolerance and benevolence, opposed violence and advocated the rule of law and order. When facing fallacies propagated by religious extremist forces, they have exposed their lies with proper faith. When violent or terrorist events take place, they always express their opinions and uncover the truth. After the July 5, 2009 riot in Urumqi, the May 22 bombing in Urumqi and the attacks on July 28 in Shache in 2014, Xinjiang religious circles immediately stated their stand, and condemned the violent criminal and terrorist offenses. When religious extremist forces take advantage of religion to interfere with people's life, they criticize such acts according to their doctrines and actively guide religious believers to maintain proper faith and conduct honest deeds.

Participate in economic construction. Carrying forward the fine tradition of reaching out and benefiting all beings, Xinjiang religious circles guide religious believers to master advanced technologies, participate in economic construction and improve living conditions. They encourage religious believers to become better off through diligent work, for instance, contract of land, setting up businesses, planting, animal breeding, transportation and food processing. They hold demonstrations to introduce experiences of achieving prosperity through hard work and hold up model households as examples. They also try to foster in religious circles a good atmosphere of honoring labor, prosperity through hard work, and advocating science and technology.

Be enthusiastic about social service and public welfare. Xinjiang religious circles actively conduct public welfare and charity activities. They hold annual charity week jointly launched by five major religions to promote public welfare and charity undertakings in Xinjiang. They have participated in disaster relief, with both donation and prayers, for the earthquake victims in Wenchuan, Yushu and Pishan, and said prayers for and donated money and materials to victims of the May 22 terrorist bombing in Urumqi and other violent and terrorist events. Besides, they also play a positive role in charitable donations, support for the elderly and schoolchildren, poverty alleviation, spiritual consolation, environmental protection and construction of public facilities.

Conclusion

History has proved that the existence and development of religions must be adapted to society and follow the path of localization; the coexistence and integration of religions must be achieved through inclusiveness, mutual learning and harmony; and the freedom of religious belief can only be obtained by keeping religious wars and conflicts at bay.

Facts show that since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Constitutional principle of freedom of religious belief has been comprehensively implemented in Xinjiang, the citizens' freedom of religious belief is fully respected, believers' normal religious needs are effectively met, the positive role of religious circles in promoting economic development and social stability is well displayed, the government's capability of administrating religious affairs is constantly strengthened, international exchanges in the religious field are being expanded, and the proliferation and spread of religious extremism is being effectively contained.

China, based on its national conditions, sticks to the principle of independence and self-management of religious undertakings, and will never allow any foreign organization or individual to interfere with China's religious affairs. China is a socialist country in which the religions of Xinjiang exist and are active. That religions must be adapted to the socialist society is not only the requirement of China's national conditions but the intrinsic requirement of religions for their own existence and development.

Today, the freedom of religious belief in Xinjiang cannot be matched by that in any other historical period, and is undeniable to anyone who respects the facts. The Chinese government resolutely opposes the politicization of religious matters and any other country's interference in China's internal affairs in the name of religion.

China is now at a decisive stage of comprehensively building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. As the core region of the Silk Road Economic Belt, Xinjiang will continue its international cooperation and exchanges on the basis of equality, friendship and mutual respect, promote dialogue and exchanges among different religions and civilizations, enhance mutual trust and understanding, and make remarkable contributions to world peace and development as well as to human civilization and progress as a whole.