

MASTER'S THESIS

Church and state relations in contemporary China: a case study of the Wenzhou Catholic Church

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**Church and State Relations in Contemporary China:
A Case Study of the Wenzhou Catholic Church**

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Abstract

Since the implementation of the reform and opening policy, economic change has influenced China's political, economic and societal structure. In the coastal areas, some provinces and cities have experienced significant economic growth, including Wenzhou in the Zhejiang Province. In addition, religions in China have also been revived in the reform era, and the number of religious believers is increasing rapidly. Similarly, some churches have experienced dramatic changes as the result of state intervention and wider social forces. Although a web of religious regulation has been introduced since the 1980s, religions in China, including Christianity, are still able to find free spaces in which to develop. As economic growth, state intervention and social forces become intertwined, church and state relations in contemporary China have begun to change and interact with Chinese society. Based on a field study, this dissertation examines church and state relations in the Wenzhou diocese in contemporary China using an analytical framework of state-society relations and theoretical approaches to civil society.

This study finds that the Wenzhou Catholic Church exhibits several significant characteristics of civil society to varying degrees, for example, in terms of independence, self-organizing structures, the power of church elites and laity, and the rational-critical discourse of the Wenzhou model. Furthermore, the main characteristics of the church and state relations in Wenzhou during the reform period are found to be diverse, dynamic and complicated.

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