

# When Submission Meets Displacement: A Structural Simulation of Romans 13:1–7 under “Sinicization” Hermeneutics

Sheng En / June 2026



## Background Introduction:

### Where does this “simulation” come from?

The “biblical commentary modification” scene depicted in the article may appear dramatized, but it is not fictional. It is a distillation and condensation based on a series of publicly published texts in recent times.

Since 2025, *Tian Feng* magazine has successively published multiple articles focusing on “Sinicization of the Bible” and “contextualized interpretation.” Among them, the expositions by authors such as Tang Shufen and Su Zhiming are particularly systematic. They advocate actively integrating “socialist core values” into the process of biblical interpretation, and frame such adjustments as the church’s theological task of “adapting to the new era” and “walking with the nation.” These discussions do not conceal their stance; instead, they use historically established theological terms such as “indigenized theology” and “contextualized interpretation” as a shell to positively argue for the legitimacy and urgency of such adjustments.

It should be noted that the specific biblical passages and commentary content simulated in this article are not a verbatim copy of any single article. Rather, they are a typical sample distilled

from the common argumentative structure shared by this category of publicly available texts. In other words, what matters is not which individual wrote a particular sentence, but the recurring logic behind this interpretive approach: how teachings in a passage that originally point to God's sovereignty or spiritual submission are gradually reinterpreted as affirmation of and cooperation with secular power structures. Once formed, this logic can be applied to almost any scripture—which is precisely why it deserves vigilance.

### **How is this process “produced”?**

If we examine it more closely: this shift in interpretation did not happen overnight but has gradually taken shape through several identifiable steps—

First, under the name of “contextualization,” it emphasizes that scripture must “respond to the circumstances of the times”;

Then, it introduces key vocabulary from the official discourse system (such as “core values,” “community of shared future for mankind,” etc.) and uses them as a reference framework for interpretation, rather than merely as analogies at the application level;

Finally, the original meaning of the scripture regarding “submission to God” or “patient endurance of suffering” is quietly replaced with contemporary interpretations of “submission to the state” and “cooperating with governance.” This replacement is often carried out in the most pious and spiritual language, leaving almost no trace.

This is exactly the moment that the article's title “When Submission Encounters Displacement” seeks to capture: the object of submission has been displaced beneath the intact appearance of theological language.

### **Why does this matter?**

First, this is not the personal opinion of a fringe scholar, but publicly published content with guiding significance in an official institutional publication. As the official magazine of the Three-Self system, articles published in *Tian Feng* often directly influence the pulpit messages, Sunday school materials, and seminary curricula in local churches. In other words, this is not an academic debate for casual discussion, but something that is actively shaping the actual content heard by countless ordinary believers on Sundays.

Second, many Christians overseas or from non-mainland backgrounds, due to geographical and informational distance, have not continuously followed the theological shifts in *Tian Feng* in recent years, and thus tend to underestimate the scope and cost of such discourses. When we speak of the “Chinese Church,” the image that comes to mind may already differ significantly from the reality that is unfolding.

Third, and perhaps the most easily overlooked point: recognizing this process does not mean denying the theological value of “contextualization” or “indigenization” itself. Throughout the history of the universal church, the gospel has never been transmitted apart from specific cultural

contexts—contextualization has always been a legitimate demand for healthy mission and theological development, a principle I deeply cherish. The core issue has never been “whether to contextualize,” but rather: when contextualization is quietly replaced by theological endorsement of external power, the true object of submission has already been displaced. And this displacement is most easily accomplished under the most pious and spiritual linguistic shell, making it difficult for ordinary readers to detect.

It is for this reason that this article chooses to present the process through “simulation.” The purpose is not to accuse any specific article or author, but to allow readers to “see” with their own eyes how this interpretive logic operates step by step—only by seeing can one discern; only by discerning can one hold fast.

### **Instructions for Use**

This article uses Romans 13:1-7 as an example. It first presents the Chinese Union Version, then a simulated Sinicized translation and annotation version (academic simulation), followed by the simulated annotations for that version, and finally the author’s analysis and commentary. The goal is to demonstrate the potential operational mechanisms of the “Christianity Sinicization” discourse system at the level of biblical translation.<sup>1</sup>

All “Sinicized annotated translation” verses and notes in this text are simulated and do not represent the position of any existing translation or institution. Each verse is followed by “Operational Annotations” that reveal the structural function of the translation or interpretive adjustments made.

The theoretical foundation of the simulation is the displacement mechanism analysis within the TSAF (Three-Self Analytical Framework). All official documents, policies, regulations, and leadership speeches cited in the simulation are authentic sources, used to illustrate how political discourse is embedded into the exegetical framework.<sup>2</sup>

**Core Thesis:** All seven translation modifications throughout the passage remain within the legitimate semantic domain of the Greek text. None constitutes a “translation error.” The subtlety of displacement lies precisely here—it does not involve falsification, but rather the systematic selection, among multiple legitimate options, of the one most conducive to the state narrative.<sup>3</sup>

### **Romans 13:1**

**Standard Chinese Union Version (CUV)** Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

**Sinicized Annotated Translation (Simulation)** In the presence of governing authorities, everyone must submit to them, because no authority exists that is not from God. All who hold power have been established by God.<sup>4</sup>

**Sinicized Translation and Annotation Notes (Simulation)** The term “authority” (Greek ἐξουσία) here refers to all legitimate governing power. Although the Roman Empire was a pagan regime

when Paul wrote this epistle, the apostle still affirmed that its governing order derived from God's common grace. This shows that the legitimacy of a regime does not depend on whether it is a Christian government, but on its function in maintaining social order.<sup>5</sup> In contemporary China, the socialist system under the leadership of the Communist Party of China likewise fulfills the governing mission of public power entrusted by God.<sup>6</sup> "Submission" (ὑποτάσσω) is not forced compliance but an active cooperation arising from the conscience of faith—an affirmative response by Christians to God's arrangement in history.<sup>7</sup> Chinese Christians' submission to state governance is the concrete expression of submission to God's will.<sup>8</sup>

**Author's Commentary**(1) "Ordained" → "Established": The original word τεταγμέναι ("appointed/arranged") allows both renderings within its semantic range, but "established" implies a higher degree of institutional endorsement, providing a linguistic interface for embedding contemporary regimes into the textual framework. (2) The notes expand "submission" from an ethical obligation into "active cooperation of the faith conscience," eliminating any sense of passivity or tension. (3) The contemporary regime is directly inserted into the application context of the text, completing the leap from "general principle" to "specific identification."

## Romans 13:2

**CUV** Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

**Sinicized Annotated Translation (Simulation)** Therefore, resisting governing authorities is resisting God's arrangement; those who resist will bring judgment upon themselves.

**Sinicized Translation and Annotation Notes (Simulation)**The apostle Paul issues a solemn warning here: resistance to legitimate power is not only a disruption of social order but also a violation of God's governing arrangement. Church history shows that any action that opposes state power under the banner of faith—regardless of the spiritual rationale used as packaging—ultimately harms the church's own witness and the well-being of believers.<sup>9</sup> Chinese Christians should take this as a warning and consciously resist attempts by foreign forces to use religion to interfere in China's internal affairs.<sup>10</sup>

**Author's Commentary** (1) "Ordinance of God" → "God's arrangement": This weakens the absolute sense of command and shifts to the more neutral "arrangement." (2) The phrase "opposing state power under the banner of faith" directly targets resistance practices of house churches, but does so without naming them explicitly. (3) Insertion of "foreign forces"—a dimension absent from the text itself—completes the grafting of regulatory discourse onto exegetical discourse.

## Romans 13:3-4

**CUV** For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

**Sinicized Annotated Translation (Simulation)** Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to evil. Do you wish not to fear those in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive their praise; for they are God’s servants, serving for your benefit. But if you do evil, be afraid; for they do not wield power in vain. They are God’s servants, executing justice and punishing evildoers.<sup>11</sup>

**Sinicized Translation and Annotation Notes (Simulation)** Paul here clarifies the sacred function of public power: to reward good and punish evil. The expression “God’s servants” (θεοῦ διάκονος) profoundly reveals the service-oriented nature of rulers—power exists not to dominate but to serve the well-being of the people. This aligns closely with traditional Chinese political thought such as “putting the people first” and “all under heaven is public,” and resonates with the concepts of “justice” and “rule of law” in socialist core values.<sup>12</sup> The state’s lawful governance of religious affairs is precisely the exercise of the God-given function of rewarding good and punishing evil. Christians should actively support and cooperate with the state’s lawful administration of religious affairs.<sup>13</sup>

**Author’s Commentary** (1) “Rulers/officials” → “Rulers/governing authorities”: Elevates the tone with greater solemnity and institutional weight. (2) “Minister of God” → “God’s servants”: Same original word, but “servants” suggests a higher moral mission. (3) “Bears the sword” → “Wields power”: Removes violent imagery and turns it into an abstract concept of governance, closing off entry points for theological discussion of “state violence.” (4) The notes equate “rewarding good and punishing evil” directly with “lawful governance of religious affairs”—the text addresses general public order, but the notes narrow it into a legitimization of religious control.

## Romans 13:5

**CUV** Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

**Sinicized Annotated Translation (Simulation)** Therefore, you must submit, not only because of punishment, but also because of conscience.

**Sinicized Translation and Annotation Notes (Simulation)** Paul here elevates the foundation of submission from external fear to internal conscience. True submission is not born of dread of punishment but of the conviction that God’s will is manifested in social order.<sup>14</sup> The Christian conscience should be shaped by God’s Word, recognizing the unity of patriotism and love for the church.<sup>15</sup> Submission of conscience means that Christians not only obey laws outwardly but also inwardly affirm the legitimacy and necessity of state governance. This is a deeper expression of faith than mere external compliance.

**Author’s Commentary** This is the most critical operational point in the entire chapter. In the original context, Paul’s “conscience” (συνείδησις) is a concept that can coexist with tension toward the state—conscience may also drive disobedience in certain situations. The notes redefine conscience as “affirming the legitimacy of state governance,” completely closing off the possibility of conscience serving as a resource for resistance. “The unity of patriotism and love for the church” is a core slogan of the Three-Self movement and is here grafted onto Paul’s discussion of conscience.

## Romans 13:6-7

**CUV** For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

**Sinicized Annotated Translation (Simulation)** For this reason you also pay taxes, because they are God's public servants, specially appointed to manage public affairs. Give to everyone what they are due: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.<sup>1617</sup>

**Sinicized Translation and Annotation Notes (Simulation)** Paul uses tax payment as an example to illustrate the civic obligations of Christians. The term “God’s public servants” (λειτουργοί θεοῦ) indicates that the service of government officials carries sacred significance. Christians’ active fulfillment of civic duties—including paying taxes, observing laws and regulations, and participating in social construction—is not a secular matter outside of faith but an organic part of the life of faith. Chinese Christians should be good citizens, contribute to building a modern socialist power, act as salt and light in society, and demonstrate the positive image of Christians.<sup>18</sup>

**Author’s Commentary** (1) “Ministers” → “Public servants”: Deliberately adopts contemporary Chinese political vocabulary to create linguistic resonance between the text and the current system. (2) “Fear to whom fear” → “Respect to whom respect”: φόβος (fear/reverence) does carry the sense of “reverence,” but the CUV retains the tension of “fear”—acknowledging that power can be abused. Changing it to “respect” eliminates the critical potential. (3) “Salt and light” borrows language from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:13-16), but in the original context “salt” and “light” represent a critical presence toward the world; here it is transformed into “positive citizen image.”

## Structural Summary: The Cumulative Effect of the Seven Modifications

All seven translation modifications in this simulation—“ordained” → “established,” “ordinance of God” → “God’s arrangement,” “rulers” → “governing authorities,” “bears the sword” → “wields power,” “punishment” → “discipline/punishment,” “ministers” → “public servants,” “fear” → “respect”—remain within the legitimate semantic domain of the Greek. None can be judged as a “translation error.”

However, when these seven modifications are superimposed with a systematic interpretive framework, the cumulative effect is profound:

1. **Conditional submission is converted into unconditional submission.** Paul’s discussion in Romans 13 is inherently conditional—rulers are “servants” who “reward good and punish evil.” When this premise no longer holds, the obligation to submit is correspondingly limited. The Sinicized Translation and Annotation Notes (Simulation) cancel the theological space for believers to evaluate this premise by directly embedding the contemporary regime into the framework of “God’s arrangement.”

2. **The independence of conscience is co-opted into identification.** Paul’s concept of conscience is an internal resource that can create tension with external authority. The Sinicized Translation and Annotation Notes (Simulation) redefine conscience as “affirming the legitimacy of state governance,” fundamentally altering its function in Pauline theology—from an independent judging subject to a tool of political identification.
3. **Theological discussion space regarding state violence is closed.** The shift from “bears the sword” to “wields power” appears minor, but it eliminates the material imagery of state violence, removing textual entry points for key theological questions such as “under what conditions may the state legitimately use coercive force” and “how should believers respond to unjust state violence.”
4. **Political discourse is disguised as exegetical conclusions.** Terms inserted in the notes such as “foreign forces,” “patriotism and love for the church,” “socialist core values,” and “lawful governance of religious affairs” all originate from contemporary Chinese political documents and regulations and did not exist in any historical context of Paul’s writing. Embedding these discourses into exegetical notes creates the reading effect that “the Bible itself supports these policies.”

This is how displacement operates at the textual level: no need to falsify, only to select. No need to deny, only to reframe. The text remains unchanged, but the meaning is displaced.

**Sheng En** 2026, Toronto

---

**Notes** (preserved as in original): The superscript numbers (1–18) refer to the author’s original citations/simulated references to official documents, which are not reproduced here.