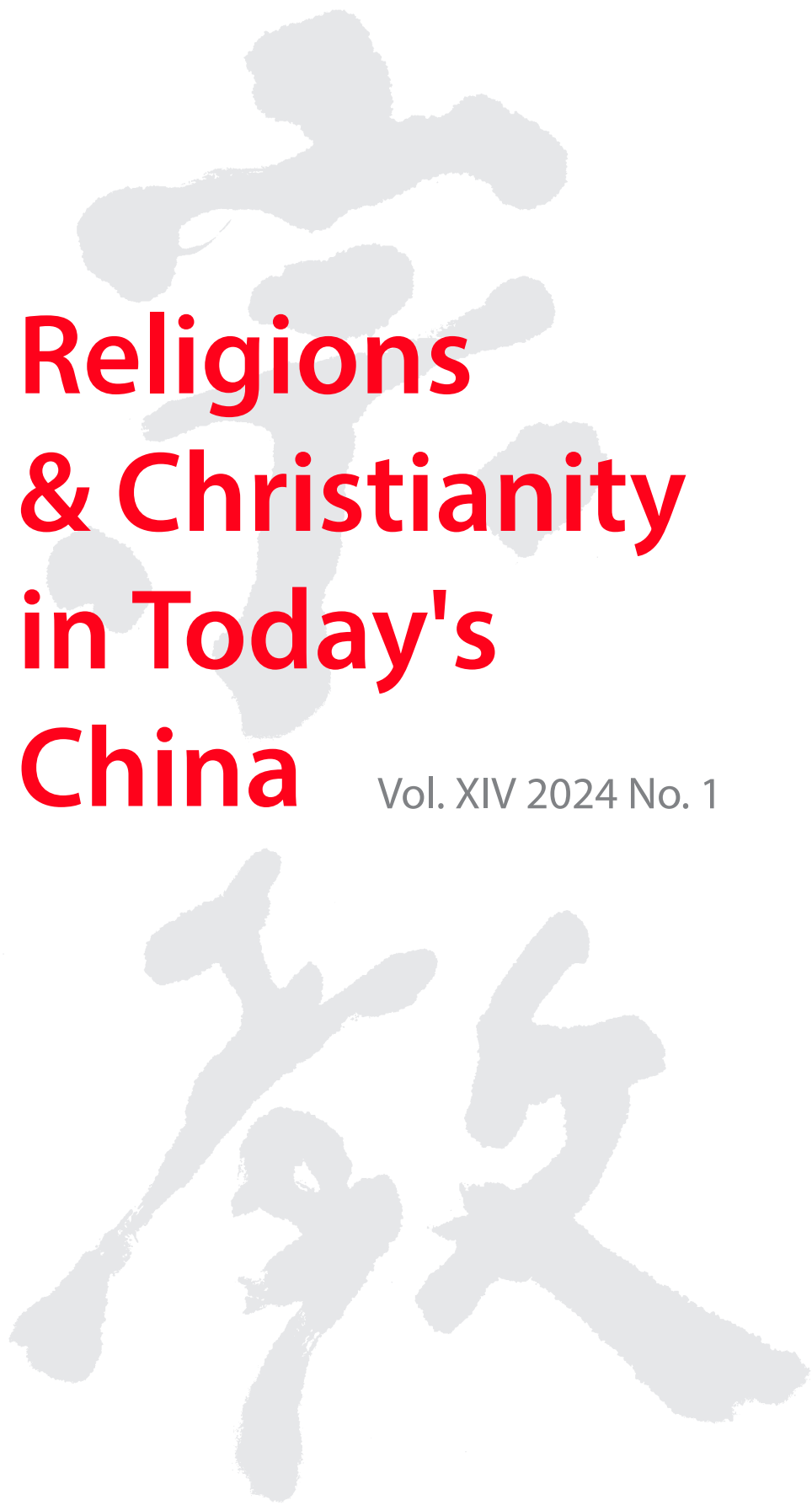


Religions  
& Christianity  
in Today's  
China

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中國宗教評論



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## Editorial

Dear Readers,

Today we can present to you the first issue of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* (中國宗教評論) in 2024.

We continue with the regular series of News Updates on recent events and general trends with regard to religions and especially Christianity in today's China.

This number, furthermore, contains five very interesting articles which were presented at the symposium “Shaping the Outlook on Life – Education and Religion in Chinese Contexts,” organized by Esther-Maria Guggenmos, Lund University, in cooperation with the Lund Mission Society. The symposium took place in Lund on May 4, 2023. See also the conference report by Prof. Guggenmos in *RCTC* 2023, No. 3, pp. 23-26. The contributions in this number are the following:

- ▶ Juliette Duléry, PhD, research and teaching fellow in political science at the Université de Rouen Normandie, “Ambivalent Civism: Evangelical Youth, Public Commitment and Moral Conservatism in Taiwan”
- ▶ Prof. Dr. Fredrik Fällman, researcher, teacher, Associate Professor of Sinology as well as Assistant Head of the Department of Languages and Literatures at University of Gothenburg, “Adaptation of Religion – A Tool for Control, Fostering or Something Else?”
- ▶ Dr. Monika Gaenssbauer, since 2020 professor of Chinese language and culture at Stockholm University, “Wang Weifan (1927–2015): Theologian, Intellectual, Artist”
- ▶ Prof. Dr. Esther-Maria Guggenmos, professor of the History of Religions at Lund University in Sweden, “Life Education in Contemporary Greater China – Are Religions Back as Players in Public Education?”
- ▶ Dr. Huang Zhicang, Ph.D. in History from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, currently postdoctoral fellow at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou, China, “Breaking Barriers: Women, Education, and Evangelization in Kulangsu International Settlement.”

*Religions & Christianity in Today's China* is freely available on the website of the China-Zentrum, [www.china-zentrum.de](http://www.china-zentrum.de). Additionally, readers who subscribe to *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* will regularly receive e-mail updates providing web links to the contents of each newly published issue. – The China-Zentrum is a non-profit organization. For the publication of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* we are dependent on the generosity of our friends and readers. In order to help us cover inevitable costs, we would be very grateful if you could consider sending a voluntary contribution.

Sankt Augustin, March 2024

The Editors

## News Update on Religion and Church in China October 13 – December 4, 2023

Compiled by Katharina Feith and Katharina Wenzel-Teuber  
Translated by David Streit SVD

*The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum ([www.china-zentrum.de](http://www.china-zentrum.de)). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2023, No. 4, pp. 3-20) covered the period June 29 – October 29, 2023.*

### Religious Studies

November 18/19, 2023:

#### Chinese Christian Studies Forum in 2023: “Featuring Prospects of Sinicized Christianity”

The forum, attended by 50 experts and academics from various research institutes and universities, was jointly organized by the Center for the Study of Christianity at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the School of Philosophy at Fudan University in Shanghai. At the same time, an academic seminar on the topic “Christianity Research and Contemporary Themes: Exploration, Breakthroughs, and New Chapters” took place. During the opening ceremony of the forum – according to *China Christian Daily* – Professor Zhuo Xinping, Honorary President of the Chinese Association of Religious Studies and member of CASS, emphasized that current Christianity research is facing unprecedented challenges and at the same time opportunities. He suggested three main concerns for future research on Christianity: “He said research should focus on the international situation and play a significant role in cultural communication and academic exchanges. Then, he highlighted the importance of emphasizing the academic rigor and seriousness of research and conducting scholarly inquiries from a scientific standpoint and approach. Thirdly, he stated that Christian research should align with China’s national conditions and correspond to the country’s social development,” thus *China Christian Daily*. Other speakers included Zhou Weichi, Institute for World Religions at CASS; Zhang Zhigang, Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies and Head of the Institute of Religious Culture at Peking University on “Localization and Sinicization from the Perspective of World Christian History”; Professor Zhang Qingxiong of Fudan University on “Love, Order, and Progress as the Goal of Social Governance: On the Sociology of Auguste Comte”; Professor Liu Ping from the School of Philosophy at Fudan University on “An Overlooked Translation of the Southern Baptist Convention: An Exegesis of the Poteat Version of Bible Translation” and Tang Xiaofeng, Vice Director of the Institute of World Religions at CASS and Director of the Center for Christianity Research at CASS, on “Setting the Standard

in All Directions: A Study of Religious Practices of Arcaoun in the Yuan Dynasty.” The forum experts then discussed in two sub-events the perspectives, prospects, and potential of the Sinicization of Christianity, as well as the development, expansion, and innovation of Christianity research under the new era, according to *China Christian Daily* (*China Christian Daily* Nov. 23; [http://iwr.cssn.cn/xw/202311/t20231120\\_5697668.shtml](http://iwr.cssn.cn/xw/202311/t20231120_5697668.shtml)). *kf*

## Religious Policy

November 8, 2023:

### ***Bitter Winter* reports on a letter to parents from a middle school in Yushu (Qinghai): Parents must educate children not to believe in any religion**

As the website reported, the Second Ethnic Middle School of Yushu City, Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province sent a “Letter to Family Heads” dated September 4, 2023. It contains a call to keep children away from religion. “It is the duty of schools and parents to educate minors not to believe in any religion,” the letter says. “We should oppose any organization or individual trying to guide, support, permit, or conduce minors to believe in religion or participate in religious activities.” The wording of the letter (in Chinese) is almost identical to that of January 25, 2021 parent letter published on the website of the Kaijiang County education department in Sichuan, so it is a kind of sample letter. Similar letters have become known from various places in China in recent years. Arguments include, among other things, that minors are “the future of the fatherland,” that the constitution (Article 36) and the education law stipulate the separation of religion, and education and that keeping them away from religion guarantees that minors will grow up “healthily.”

*Bitter Winter* does not cite a source; it presumably took the letter from the microblog of Marxism researcher Xi Wuyi 习五一. There, Xi Wuyi brings a photo of Yushu’s parents’ letter and comments: “The fact that minors are not allowed to practice religion is an implementation of the principle of ‘separation of education and religion’ [#教育与宗教相分离#] of the national education law!” A reader’s comment under Xi Wuyi’s post reads: “There should be a letter like this in all schools in China, every semester,” another: “There is another problem: the reincarnations of Living Buddhas are minors!” ([www.bitter-winter.org](http://www.bitter-winter.org) Nov. 8; <https://m.weibo.cn/detail/4952021142341296> [Microblog Xi Wuyi], Oct. 1).

On the restriction of minors practicing religion, see *China heute* 2021, No. 4, pp. 207-210 (in German), there also the letter to parents from Kaijiang. *kwt*

## Daoism

November 24–28, 2023:

### **Nearly 300 overseas Zhengyi Daoists receive ordination by “conferring of registers”**

The “conferring of registers” (授箓) took place at the Celestial Masters’ Residence in the Longhu Mountains in Jiangxi Province. The newly ordained Daoist priests came from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao, as well as Malaysia, Australia, Myanmar, Canada, Great Britain, and Belarus. Before the registration was awarded, their documents were checked. The “registration awarding activity” – according to the report on the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) website – was approved by the National Religious

Affairs Administration and organized by the CDA, with the participation of the Daoist associations of Jiangxi Province and Longhu Mountain and the Celestial Masters' Residence.

At the same location a little later, from November 30 to December 7, the first registers (初授箒) were conferred on around 400 local Daoist adepts from 20 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities of the PRC ([www.taoist.org.cn](http://www.taoist.org.cn) Nov. 25; Dec. 7). *kwt*

## Buddhism

November 4, 2023:

### Official Panchen Lama ordains monks at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery for the first time

The Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse is the traditional seat of the Panchen Lamas. The ceremonial ordination of 28 young monks from the monastery by the official, China-appointed Panchen Lama is described in detail and with many images in the Chinese media. According to a comment on the state website *Zhongguo Xizang wang* ([www.tibet.cn](http://www.tibet.cn)), the ordination shows that the Panchen has the ability to accept and ordain students. This is a sign that the Panchen's Dharma achievements and religious status have continued to rise, the website remarked. The successful ordination ceremony also underscored the Panchen's Dharma achievements and his standing in the religious community, the website said further. According to *Bitter Winter*, however, only a few Tibetans would voluntarily take part in the official Panchen ceremonies ([www.bitterwinter.org](http://www.bitterwinter.org) Nov. 21; [www.tibet.cn](http://www.tibet.cn) Nov. 7).

In 1995, the Chinese government kidnapped the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama, recognized by the Dalai Lama, and installed its own 11th Panchen. The Panchen Lamas are considered the second highest spiritual authority of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama and play an important role in identifying the latter's reincarnation. *kwt*

November 9–10, 2023:

### “2023 Conference on the Interpretation of the Teachings of Tibetan Buddhism” in Beijing

The High Level Tibetan Buddhism College of China and the China Tibetology Research Center (the latter a state-run think tank) hosted the meeting. It was titled “Responding to the Demands of the Times, Finding the Right Role – Comprehensive and Strict Governance of Religions and New Opportunities for Tibetan Buddhism in the New Era.” As stated in the conference report distributed by the WeChat account of the Party's United Front Department, the conference participants reached the following consensus regarding the future interpretation of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism (藏传佛教教义阐释): “From a historical perspective, Tibetan Buddhism is a product of the Sinicization of Buddhism; from a practical perspective, the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism is an ongoing, uninterrupted process.” Sinicized religions must apply a Sinicized interpretation of their teachings and rules guided by the core socialist values, Tudeng Kezhu, rector of the Academy of Tibetan Buddhism, was quoted. The Tibetan Buddhist Sangha must be raised to the sense of community of the Chinese nation, said Lakho Rinpoche Lobsang Tenpe Wangchug, head of the Buddhist Association of Qinghai Province. According to the report, the doctrinal interpretation work takes place mainly in Buddhist academies at all levels, and the results of their work are then concentrated at the joint conferences of the High Level Tibetan Buddhism College of China and the China Tibetology Research Center. The report says that since these conferences began in 2011, more than ten volumes of doctrinal interpretations

have been published in Tibetan and Chinese language and have found their way into classrooms and temples. During the conference it was also suggested that the new doctrinal interpretations be disseminated through comics and animations as well as in the “national common language” ([www.tibetology.ac.cn/2023-11/15/content\\_42595167.htm](http://www.tibetology.ac.cn/2023-11/15/content_42595167.htm)). *kwt*

**November 10, 2023:**

## **PRC State Council releases Tibet White Paper “CPC Policies on the Governance of Xizang in the New Era: Approach and Achievements”**

Chapter III of the document “Solid Progress in Ethnic and Religious Undertakings” contains the point “Fully guaranteeing the freedom of religious belief.” In the Tibet Autonomous Region, today there are “over 1,700 sites for Tibetan Buddhism activities, approximately 46,000 Buddhist monks and nuns, four mosques, about 12,000 native Muslims, and one Catholic church with over 700 believers,” the White Paper says. It further says that in 2007, the state issued “Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas of Tibetan Buddhism,” stipulating that reincarnations of Living Buddhas, including high reincarnations such as the Dalai and the Panchen Lamas, must be sought within China [which is not explicitly stated in the Measures], identified by lot-drawing from the Golden Urn, and receive approval from the [Chinese] central government. According to the White Paper, “93 newly reincarnated living Buddhas have been approved and recognized” by the end of 2022. One learns from the White Paper that there are “Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Measures on the Management of Living Buddha Reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhism” (西藏自治区“藏传佛教活佛转世管理办法”实施细则). “The government provides over RMB 26 million per annum to cover medical insurance, pension schemes, subsistence allowances, accident injury insurance, and health check expenses for all registered monks and nuns. Great efforts have gone into improving infrastructure in monasteries and temples [...]” the White Paper says. It further claims that “Tibetan Buddhist studies and the training of adepts have been strengthened.” Here the document also mentions the efforts to interpret the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism (see the previous entry). The English version of the White Paper (full text at [www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/zfbps\\_2279/202311/t20231110\\_778528.html](http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/zfbps_2279/202311/t20231110_778528.html)) consistently uses the Chinese term “Xizang” instead of “Tibet.” *kwt*

**November 26, 2023:**

## ***Sixth Tone*: Wenshu Monastery in Chengdu promotes vegetarianism for visitors**

Liu Shuman, “a vegetarian blogger, chef, and Ph.D. candidate at the Chinese University of Hong Kong,” reports on Buddhist monasteries’ promotion of a vegetarian lifestyle in a lengthy essay on November 26 in *Sixth Tone*. At Wenshu Monastery, every Saturday evening since 2018, the monks have offered visitors of all faiths a seat at their table with a lavish but free offering of dozens of vegetarian dishes. In keeping with the teachings of Buddhism, all dishes are strictly vegetarian and prepared without the “five pungent ingredients” or *wuxin* 五辛, such as onion, garlic, and chives. Since 2009, the monastery has also been offering free vegetarian cooking courses, in which weekly meals are also prepared. Not only the meditative aspect but also the form of the prepared dishes play a crucial role. Over the centuries, monastic vegetarianism has evolved into a culinary art form in its own right, says *Sixth Tone*. Culinary culture takes two forms in monasteries like Wenshu. On the one hand, there are simple rice and vegetable recipes for the monks’ daily menu, and on the other hand, there are vegetarian delicacies that

are much more complicated to prepare and more complex to present, according to the report. These would be served not to monks but to visitors and benefactors, usually in a canteen run by the temple, but also on special occasions such as a memorial service for a donor to the temple. This is also reflected in the cooking courses. The half-year, full-time training program promises to teach students more than 100 “standard Chan monastic dishes.” The popularization of Buddhist vegetarianism is a way to make Buddhism more relatable and accessible, it says. The idea was to show students that Buddhist philosophy can be found even in the most mundane things, such as cutting potatoes. Although spending two hours cutting a potato would be absurd in any other context – Li Shuman states –, it helps students in the classroom enter a state of tranquility and mindfulness. In keeping with the roughly thousand-year-old tradition that monks must earn their meals through daily work, students would also be required to do voluntary work in the monastery, such as copying sutras (*Sixth Tone* Nov. 26). *kf*

December 4, 2023:

## Joint declaration of the two rival incarnations of the Karmapa on the reincarnation of the Shamarpa

The Shamarpa is an important incarnation lineage of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, of which the Karmapa is the head. The 14th Shamarpa died in 2014. For the current 17th Karmapa Lama, two different boys were confirmed as a reincarnation by different high-ranking lamas of the lineage. The Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje, born in 1983, was confirmed by the 14th Shamarpa. He came to India as a child and was educated there. The Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, born in 1985, is recognized by the Dalai Lama (who, however, is the head of another school of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelugpa) and the Chinese government. He was trained in the PRC under government supervision and fled to India in late December 1999. On October 11, 2018, the two Karmapas had announced in a joint declaration that they wanted to overcome the split in the Karma Kagyu line (see *RCTC* 2019, No. 1, p. 6). In their latest joint statement, the two Karmapas announce that the responsibility for recognizing the next Shamarpa falls to both of them. They explain that, first, the recognition of the reincarnation of Shamar Rinpoche will be “a joint effort by the two of us together. Neither of us will do it separately.” Secondly, they declare that together they will take responsibility for the “education, empowerments, transmissions, and pith instructions” of the future Shamarpa. Third, they declare that they “will not accept interference from any uninvolved parties.” Finally, they write: “To foment disputes and create schisms amongst ourselves is nothing other than a disservice to our predecessors in the lineage and a method for us to destroy our own lineage. Thus, it would have a strong positive impact for every single follower of the Karma Kamtsang to recite, with deep regret for their past actions, the Vajrasattva mantra a minimum of one hundred thousand times and The Sutra in Three Sections one thousand times, as soon as possible. We should also have the firm resolve that from now on, the precious Practice Lineage should never split into two factions and that there never again be any disputes over the reincarnations of Kagyu masters [...]” (text available at [www.karmapa.org/a-joint-statement-regarding-the-reincarnation-of-kunzig-shamar-rinpoche](http://www.karmapa.org/a-joint-statement-regarding-the-reincarnation-of-kunzig-shamar-rinpoche)).

According to their own statements, the two Karmapas have met several times. But there are also problems: As *Buddhistdoor Global* reported, there are allegations of sexual abuse against Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje. Two Buddhism researchers therefore set up the website “Healing our Sanghas” in 2022 (*Buddhistdoor Global* May 24, 2021; Nov. 2, 2022; Dec. 5, 2023).

Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje married in 2017, ending his monasticism. At that time he publicly stated that he would continue to carry out his role and activities as Karmapa as before his marriage, with the exception of ordinations. According to his website, the 15th Karmapa was also married ([www.karmapa.org](http://www.karmapa.org) March 29, 2017). *kwt*



## Islam

November 22, 2023:

### Human Rights Watch publishes report on “Politics of Mosque Consolidation” in Ningxia and Gansu

In the northwestern Chinese provinces of Ningxia and Gansu, the Chinese government is sharply reducing the number of mosques, according to the report “China: Mosques Shuttered, Razed, Altered in Muslim Areas. Curbing Islam via ‘Consolidation’ Policy in Ningxia, Gansu Provinces,” which the New York-based human rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) published on November 22. Many Hui Muslims live in Ningxia and Gansu, and the number of mosques is particularly high there. According to Chinese Islamic Association figures cited by HRW, there were 39,019 mosques across China in 2015, including 24,100 in Xinjiang, 4,606 in Gansu and 4,203 in Ningxia. As part of a policy of “mosque consolidation,” authorities have decommissioned, closed down, demolished, or converted many of these mosques for secular use, according to HRW.

HRW attributes this policy to an internal document (2018, No. 24) issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on April 19, 2018, entitled “Views on Strengthening and Improving Islamic Work in the New Situation” (关于加强和改造新形势下伊斯兰教工作意见). This document, which is attached as a link to the HRW report, became internationally known in 2019 through the “Xinjiang Papers” leak. It directs that in the western areas of the PRC “in principle, no new construction or establishment of [Islamic religious] activity venues is allowed,” except for resettlement projects [of people from poverty-stricken areas to other parts of the province]. During resettlements and reconstructions of old urban areas, “new activity venues will be incorporated into urban and rural planning and overall land use planning, and the principles of ‘demolish more and build less’ and ‘build mosques in a consolidated manner’ will be adhered to, so as to consolidate and reduce the total number. Places of activity and temporary sites of worship are not to be set up for one ethnic group or one religious sect alone” (document point III.7.). [It should be noted that Islam is extremely diverse especially in northwest China: In addition to the oldest Islamic school of the Gedimu (Qadim) and the Yihewani (Ikhwani) movement, there are several large Sufi orders, each with numerous subgroups.]

HRW writes that during resettlements, several villages are often “consolidated” into one and the number of mosques is reduced subsequently. This policy is called 合坊并寺, 合村并寺 or 合坊建寺 – something like “uniting villages and merging mosques.” The government argues that if different Islamic denominations were to share the same venue, they would learn to become more “unified” and “harmless,” the HRW report said.

HRW found many reports from Chinese authorities about mosque consolidations, but few that contained concrete figures. The following examples from Ningxia are cited in the HRW report:

- In Zhongwei City, in 2019, according to authorities, “214 mosques were altered [整改], 58 mosques were consolidated [合坊并寺], and 37 non-legally registered mosques were closed.” According to an official mosque directory of Ningxia, Zhongwei had 852 mosques in 2009.
- The Qingtongxia City government reported in 2020 that it had merged 6 mosques; in 2009 Qingtongxia had 69 mosques.
- In the town of Jingui, the authorities stated in 2021 that they “thoroughly rectified more than 130 locations with Islamic architectural feature ... and pursued ‘mosque integration’ in an orderly manner.”
- In the town of Baitugang, Lingwu City, five mosques were “consolidated” in 2021, according to authorities.

Using photos and videos posted online, as well as satellite images, the HRW report also details the changes and destruction of mosques in two villages in Ningxia.

HRW was unable to determine the total number of mosques affected. However, the report points out that Hui researchers Hannah Theaker (University of Plymouth) and David Stroup (University of Manches-

ter) estimate in a forthcoming study that a third of all registered mosques in Ningxia have been closed since 2020 (HRW report: [www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/22/china-mosques-shuttered-razed-altered-muslim-areas](http://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/22/china-mosques-shuttered-razed-altered-muslim-areas); “Views on Strengthening and Improving Islamic Work in the New Situation” from 2018 according to <https://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Transcript-Document-10.pdf>; *The Guardian* Nov. 22). *kwt*

## Protestant Churches

October 13–18, 2023:

### Pastor Wu Wei, President of the China Christian Council, attends the World Assembly of the United Bible Societies in the Netherlands

According to an official report on the China Christian Council and Three-Self Movement website, Pastor Wu Wei, President of the Christian Council, attended the 2023 World Assembly in Egmond aan Zee at the invitation of the United Bible Societies (UBS) and the Bible Society for the Netherlands and Flanders. Rev. Wu Wei held discussions with the management of UBS as well as the general secretaries of the Bible Societies of the Netherlands, France, Malaysia, India, Thailand, and Pakistan, among others. He also met with Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, who expressed interest in the development of the Church in China and “the willingness to visit China,” the report says. – According to the UBS report, around 390 people took part in the world assembly, including representatives from 147 Bible Societies worldwide. The theme of the assembly was “God’s Word: Reconciliation for the World.” The World Assemblies take place every five to eight years (<https://en.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/17033>; <https://unitedbiblesocieties.org/ubs-fellowship-affirms-statement-at-2023-ubs-world-assembly-in-egmond/>). *kf*

October 25, 2023:

### 5th Minzu Dialogue Forum of United Bible Societies and Minzu University of China

The fifth dialogue jointly organized by the Department of Religious Studies at the Minzu University of China (MUC) in Beijing and the United Bible Societies (UBS) took place in person again this year after two years online. “Interpreting the Psalms in Our Everyday Life – Joys, Sorrows, and Hopes” was the topic of the dialogue, which was attended by Chinese scholars from Sichuan University, Shandong University, the Protestant Fujian Theological Seminary, and, on the Catholic side, a Chinese religious sister as well as international scholars from UBS. The broad subject area included contributions to the Psalms including translation, theological interpretations, social and historical findings, comparative studies, and cross-cultural interpretations. Postgraduate students from Minzu University also took part in the dialogue. The host on the Chinese side was Prof. You Bin, Director of the Department of Religious Studies at MUC. Dr. Bernard Low, Co-Director of UBS China Partnership, thanked Prof. You Bin and his team for organizing the event on site. Speakers at the one-day dialogue included Dr. Anwar Tjen, Head of the Translation Department at the Indonesian Bible Society; Dr. Daud Soesilo, UBS Global Translation Advisor; Dr. Zhang Xinyu, Assistant Professor at Fujian Theological Seminary; Sister Rong Lina, a Catholic scholar; and Jiang Zhenshuai, Associate Professor at Shandong University (<https://ubscp.org/minzu-university-of-china-successfully-organised-the-5th-minzu-dialogue-with-united-bible-societies/>). *kf*

October 30 / November 22, 2023:

## Visits by representatives of the United Bible Societies China Partnership to China

On November 22, Dr. Bernard Low, Co-Director of UBS China Partnership, visited the two official Protestant bodies, the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Movement, with a 12-member delegation. The two sides – according to the report on the bodies' website – talked about their cooperation and friendship and exchanged views on Bible translation, Bible distribution; and academic seminars after the epidemic. Pastor Shan Weixiang, Vice President and General Secretary of the Christian Council, and Dr. Bernard Low moderated the discussion. On behalf of UBS, Dr. Low thanked for the warm welcome. According to the report, he re-emphasized UBS's respect for the three-self principle of the Chinese Church and its support for the service of Sinicizing Christianity, and looked forward to deeper and more comprehensive cooperation in the future to maintain good friendship and bear rich fruit. – On October 30, Dr. Bernard Low also visited the Shaanxi provincial level official bodies and the Shaanxi Bible College ([www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/17001](http://www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/17001); [www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/17083](http://www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/17083)). *kf*

November 4, 2023:

## Pastor Wu Wei meets representatives of the Russian Evangelical Alliance

As reported by the Beijing-based *China Christian Daily* and the official website of the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Movement, Dr. William Yoder, a member of the Russian Evangelical Alliance, paid an official visit to the Chinese church leadership “to promote friendship among Protestant churches in China and Russia,” according to *China Christian Daily*. On November 4, he met Rev. Wu Wei, president of the Christian Council. Pastor Wu taught Dr. Yoder about the three-self principles and “the ministry of Sinicization of Christianity in progress,” the report says. Wu said that churches in China have been willing to connect with churches across the world under the three-self principle. Dr. Yoder pointed out that there has been little exchange between the churches in Russia and Chinese churches in recent decades. He hoped that the Russian Evangelical Alliance would organize a delegation visit to the churches in China. Dr. Yoder also visited the official Protestant bodies of the city of Shanghai and the East China Theological Seminary. – The Russian Evangelical Alliance was founded in 2003 and is a member of the World Evangelical Alliance (*China Christian Daily* Nov. 10; <https://en.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/17037>). *kf*

November 22, 2023:

## Preacher Chang Hao remains in custody

Chang Hao, a preacher at a small, unregistered church in a rural area of Zhaotong City, Yunnan Province, was arrested in a raid on April 14 and has been in custody ever since. As *Bitter Winter* reported, his case would proceed to trial. The reason for the arrest at that time was that anti-Covid masks inscribed with Bible verses would be “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” On November 22, *Bitter Winter* said, his family contacted various human rights organizations with a statement saying the trial was about “publishing and forwarding false information on the Internet, inappropriate speeches, causing serious chaos in public order, and having a bad social impact.” The relatives were of the opinion that all of these accusations can be attributed solely to the fact that Chang Hao ran a non-authorized

house church and distributed the anti-Covid masks with Biblical verses (*Bitter Winter* Dec. 4; see also *RCTC* 2023, No. 3, p. 8). *kf*

## Catholic Church

October 25, 2023:

### Book with testimonies of Chinese LGBTQ Catholics presented to Pope Francis

At their meeting with the Pope in the Vatican, representatives of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (G.N.R.C.) had, among other things, a copy of the book *Blessed Are Those Who Mourn: Chinese Tongzhi Catholics' Tales*, published in 2022, as a gift. It is the English edition of 願你的唇吻我 (published 2018), a collection of testimonies from Chinese LGBTQ Catholics in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and the Chinese Diaspora (Malaysia). The editor is Eros Shaw 愛若, a young homosexual Catholic from mainland China who, together with seminarian Xiao Bei 小貝, founded the China Catholic Rainbow Community 天主彩虹团体.

In a 2017 text on the G.N.R.C. website, Eros Shaw reports the following: The China Catholic Rainbow Community emerged around 2013 from the ecumenical China Rainbow Witness Fellowship 彩虹见证团契, which was founded in Beijing in 2009. It provides counseling and spiritual companionship for Catholic believers who are LGBTQ. Members gather regularly for church services and there is also a catechumenate group. Meetings with up to 90 community members in a church room in Shanghai provided by a parish priest ended after several months after a Catholic group reacted extremely negatively on social media. But the community continued its work. A few priests, seminarians, and religious women voluntarily accompany the groups that exist in various Chinese cities. Eros Shaw estimates that of mainland China's 12.5 million Catholics, at least 200,000 are LGBTQ. "There are plenty of platforms on the Internet for gay Christians, such as Weibo, Weixin, QQ group and other websites, but they are mostly for Protestants while ours is one of the few that serve gay Catholics," he wrote in 2017. In October 2015, Eros Shaw took part in the founding of the global network G.N.R.C. in Rome as a representative of the China Catholic Rainbow Community (<https://outreach.faith/2023/10/pope-francis-shows-support-to-lgbtq-catholic-groups-as-synod-meets/> [with photo of the book]; [www.ridayat.my/chinese-tongzhi-catholics-tales-blessed-are-those-who-mourn](http://www.ridayat.my/chinese-tongzhi-catholics-tales-blessed-are-those-who-mourn) [Book information]; <https://rainbow-catholics.org/gay-catholics-in-mainland-china/> [Report Eros Shaw 2017]; *UCAN* Nov. 3, 2016; private source). *kwt*

October 28, 2023:

### Dating event for single young Catholics in Hangzhou

As Hangzhou grows rapidly, many young Catholics are coming to the city alone to study, start a business, or look for work, according to a report on the Chinese Catholic website *Xinde (Faith)*. Their parents at home are worried about their children getting married, and the search for a partner for single Catholic young women and men is also an important issue for the Church. Therefore, on the initiative of Pastor Zheng Jiamao, the Nazareth Family, and the youth group of Hangzhou Parish organized the two-part dating event, in which a total of 120 young people took part. An introductory day on September 10 was followed by an outdoor activity on October 28. The young people were able to get to know each other through exchanges, games, and scenarios. The understanding of marriage and family was also discussed. In addition, a database of single young men and women in the parish was set up, and

opportunities were created for later deeper acquaintances through dining vouchers, cinema vouchers, date vouchers, etc. (www.xinde.org Oct. 30). *kwt*

**November 6–15, 2023:**

## **Commission for Liturgy, Sacred Music and Sacred Art visits churches in Hunan and Jiangxi – regarding uniform breviary and hymn book**

The Commission on Liturgy, Sacred Music and Sacred Art is a commission of the official Catholic governing bodies, Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and Bishops' Conference. The visit was about the implementation of a year-old decision by the Catholic governing bodies, namely to create uniform Catholic hymn and prayer books nationwide (see *RCTC* 2023, No. 1, p. 6). The research team was led by Bishops Liu Xinhong and Cui Qingqi, the commission's heads. The team presented the work on "unification and standardization" of the "Book of Hours of the Holy Church" (圣教日课) to churches in both provinces and explained the need for a unified hymnal (圣歌本) as there were too many different editions and the liturgical songs were not standardized. Representatives from the churches of Hunan and Jiangxi reported on the hymn books and books of hours used in local congregations. Fr. Li Rongpin, deputy director of *Xinde* (Faith Press) in Shijiazhuang, presented various drafts of the Book of Hours and asked for participants' opinions on the cover design, page layout, and structure. The report on the Catholic governing bodies' website states, among other things, that the research team was welcomed in Jiangxi by Bishop Li Suguang and "Auxiliary Bishop Peng Weizhao" (the former underground bishop of Yujiang) (www.chinacatholic.cn Nov. 17). *kwt*

**November 7–8, 2023:**

## **"First Conference on the Sinicization of Shanghai Catholicism: History and Perspectives"**

The main organizer of the large-scale conference was the Diocese of Shanghai, co-organizers were the Shanghai Catholic Patriotic Association, the Shanghai Catholic Commission for Church Affairs, and the Shanghai Catholic Intelligentsia Association. In the report on the Shanghai Diocese website, these four bodies are collectively referred to as "三会一区" (Three Associations and One Diocese). 20 experts from 10 research units gave lectures, and around 200 priests, sisters, and lay leaders took part in the conference.

In his opening speech, Beijing Bishop Li Shan, chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, highlighted the long history of Catholicism in Shanghai and its contributions to the Church's development after the beginning of the opening-up policy [i.e. after the Cultural Revolution]. It is an "important front" for the Sinicization of the Church, Bishop Li said. Chen Chang, head of the Shanghai religious affairs authority, said that since Bishop Shen Bin was in Shanghai, Shanghai's Catholic community has undergone promising changes and developed a positive, upwardly mobile spiritual condition. Bishop Shen Bin, in turn, said that history teaches that only unshakable adherence to the path of Sinicization, patriotism, independence, and autonomy of the Chinese Catholic Church can bring a successful future. Shen Bin is also chairman of the official Chinese Bishops' Conference. In addition to the political consequences of the change in the world religious situation (Xu Yihua, Fudan University) and various theoretical aspects of Sinicization (Zhang Zhigang, Peking University, among others), the 20 expert lectures also dealt with concrete Catholic role models from Shanghai's Church history such as Xu Guangqi, Xu Zongze, and Ma Xiangbo. Liu Guopeng (CASS) reported on papal documents on the

China mission. Fr. Fang Buke (Sheshan Seminary) spoke about the eight ideals of Catholic education, and Fr. Gao Chaopeng (Dean of Sheshan Seminary) introduced the work of the Diocese's Guangqi Social Service Center (www.catholicsh.org Nov. 8 [2 reports]). *kwt*

**November 16, 2023:**

## Forum “Talking about the Dao by the Sea” in Shanghai on Catholicism

“Talking about the Dao by the Sea” (海上论道) is a motto of Shanghai’s religious policy, under which several forums have already been held (including in July 2023 on the Sinicization of Daoism, see *RCTC* 2023, No. 4, p. 6). The forum on Catholicism was the fourth in this series. The organizers were the National Religious Affairs Administration, the religious affairs authority and the United Front Department of Shanghai, co-organizers were the Shanghai Catholic Patriotic Association, the Shanghai Catholic Commission for Church Affairs, the Diocese of Shanghai, and the Shanghai Catholic Intelligentsia Association, as well as the United Front Department of Xuhui District. Its director, Qin Liping, declared that since Bishop Shen Bin took office in Shanghai, a new patriotic page has been opened in the Shanghai “Three Associations and One Diocese.”

During the forum, three priests and three Catholic laypeople from the Patriotic Association presented their own work and faith experiences under the theme “Loving the country and the Church and acting on it.” Three scholars then commented on these statements. Wang Zhen of the Central Institute of Socialism saw them as an expression of a “new climate” in Shanghai Catholicism. Wang explained that the core of the Sinicization of religions is the Sinicization of people, the crucial thing is the Sinicization of thinking, religious teachings, and precepts. The forum was attended by 120 people, including priests, Sisters, and lay people from the diocese (www.catholicsh.org Nov. 18). *kwt*

**November 26, 2023:**

## 83 adult catechumens are baptized and confirmed in Shanghai Cathedral

Bishop Shen Bin led the liturgy, assisted by priests Gu Zhangjun, Xie Huimin, and Wei Panwang. Around two thousand believers took part in the Mass. It was the feast of Christ the King. In his homily, Bishop Shen explained that fulfilling the commandment of love given by Christ leads to salvation, and one of the most effective methods for salvation is to recognize the kingship of Christ by faith.

The website of the diocese of Shanghai, which has been active again since Shen Bin took office as local bishop of Shanghai – officially appointed on April 4, 2023, subsequent papal appointment on July 15, 2023 – has repeatedly reported major baptism events with confirmation in recent months: 34 baptisms on July 2, 36 baptisms on August 27 (both times in the cathedral in Xujiahui), and 6 baptisms in Datanlu Parish on October 1 (www.catholicsh.org according to www.xinde.org July 4; Aug. 29; Oct. 7; Nov. 28). *kwt*

## Sino-Vatican Relations

**November 13/14, 2023:**

## On his blog, Cardinal Joseph Zen asks the brothers in the underground not to carry out illegitimate episcopal ordinations

The Hong Kong bishop emeritus, an advocate for underground Catholics and critic of the Sino-Vatican agreement, writes in his blog: “[...] I have said before: you must not ‘rebel,’ you must not do ‘illegal

things'. The Pope won't give you any more bishops underground, so there won't be any more priests or sacraments? But God can still sustain your faith! Under no circumstances may you consecrate bishops on your own initiative. You can sacrifice the sacraments, but not your faith! Remember that! Remember! Old Joseph, who shares your pain with you every day."

Ten days earlier, on November 3, an anonymous "Open Letter to Pope Francis from Chinese Faithful" was published on *The Remnant*, a website that rejects Vatican II and its consequences. The Open Letter begins with the words: "Dear Pope Francis, we, the awakening Catholics in the underground and official churches in China, write you this open letter to lament your betraying our Church and destroying our nation." The first of the accusations listed is: "You [i.e., Pope Francis] are not ordaining new bishops for the underground community. You are collaborating with CCP to push the loyal faithful to extinction. Some began to ordain 'bishops' without your approval." In addition to complaints related to the Vatican's China policy, the letter accuses the pope of failing to show public solidarity with Cardinal Zen in the face of his arrest and of remaining silent on human rights abuses in China, and deplores his "loud promotion of sexual immorality" (LGBTQ). It is unclear who is behind the drastically worded paper and how large the circle of people is which it represents (<https://oldyosef.hkdavc.com/?p=1960> Nov. 13/14; <https://remnantnewspaper.com/web/index.php/headline-news-around-the-world/item/6880-open-letter-to-pope-francis-from-chinese-faithful>). *kwt*

## Hong Kong

July/October 2023:

### Hong Kong Muslims outraged by the hoisting of the Chinese national flag at a mosque in Kowloon

Muslims at Hong Kong's largest mosque in Kowloon raised the Chinese national flag in formal ceremonies in July and October to mark the city's handover to China on July 1, 1997 and China's National Day on October 1, according to *Radio Free Asia (RFA)*. This caused shock and disappointment among some believers, who saw it as a "challenge to the Islamic doctrine of the supremacy of God." Muslim leaders in Hong Kong told *RFA* of "a developing relationship" with Chinese officials over the past 18 months, who "suggested" they begin ceremonial displays of patriotism like flag-raising ceremonies. "The ceremonies have been fairly high-profile affairs, attended by community leaders and imams, officials from Beijing's Central Liaison Office in Hong Kong, as well as high-ranking police and local government officials," according to *RFA*. Organizers said the events, which came after a series of meetings between Muslim community leaders and Chinese officials, were in fact a nod to Beijing's "Sinicization of religion" program and were likely to continue. Hong Kong's Muslim community leader, Saeed Uddin, doesn't see raising the flag as a problem: "I think this is not a bad idea, to let people be more patriotic to China. They enjoy it. It's no problem" (*RFA Cantonese* Oct. 29). *kf*

November 4, 2023:

### Cardinal Chow SJ in Hong Kong: Mass of thanksgiving after the elevation to the rank of cardinal

On November 4, Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau-yan SJ celebrated a Mass of thanksgiving at the Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Hong Kong on the occasion of his elevation to the cardinalate in Rome on September 30, 2023. The Mass was attended by Cardinals John Tong and Joseph Zen as well as Auxiliary Bishop Ha of Hong Kong, more than 100 priests from parishes and orders,

30 permanent deacons, representatives of Hong Kong's Orthodox and Protestant churches, as well as many lay people – including youth groups and friends and relatives of Cardinal Chow. Former heads of government Donald Tsang and Carrie Lam, as well as Acting Secretary for the Civil Service of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government Ingrid Yeung Ho Poi-yan, were also among those attending the service (*Sunday Examiner* Nov. 4; *Xinde* Nov. 5). *kf*

**November 9, 2023:**

## Hong Kong government: Appeal from 10 Catholic bishops for Jimmy Lai is “contempt of court”

According to a November 10 report by *AsiaNews*, the Hong Kong government strongly rejected a petition from 10 Catholic bishops from all continents calling on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government to release Jimmy Lai, a well-known pro-democracy 75-year-old Catholic who for more than 1,000 days is in prison. The founder of *Apply Daily* (the newspaper closed in 2021) has been detained under the national security law in Hong Kong since 2020. In the petition, the Catholic bishops asked “the government of the special administrative region of Hong Kong to immediately and unconditionally release Jimmy Lai, prosecuted – they write – for having supported democracy through his newspaper and various public interventions. There is no place for such cruelty and oppression in a territory that claims to uphold the rule of law and respect the right to freedom of expression.” The Hong Kong government officially contested the bishops’ appeal on November 9 through a statement from a spokesperson: “We reject the distorted words regarding the facts, signed by foreign Catholic leaders, who intend to interfere in the internal affairs of Hong Kong and in the independent exercise of the judicial power of its courts.” The note would claim that the text even contained terms for “the crime of contempt of court.” *kf*

**November 13–15, 2023:**

## Beijing Bishop Li Shan visits Hong Kong

Bishop Li traveled to Hong Kong at the invitation of Cardinal Stephen Chow SJ, Bishop of Hong Kong, as a reciprocal visit to Chow’s trip to Beijing in April this year. In addition to Bishop Li Shan, the delegation consisted of four other people, including Fr. Matthew Zhen Xuebin, chancellor of the Beijing Diocese. As *Vatican News* reported on November 18, the visit began on November 13 with the communal celebration of Vespers in the chapel of the diocesan curia. The exchange of gifts then took place in the cardinal’s office. On November 14, after Mass in the Curia Chapel, the delegation visited the Cathedral and the Chapel of the Chinese Martyrs. There was also a visit to the diocesan center and a meeting with representatives of the cathedral parish. In the afternoon there was a visit to the diocesan Holy Spirit Seminary and a meeting with the seminarians. Cardinal John Tong then received the visitors at the Holy Spirit Study Centre. A Mass was held in the Cathedral on November 15. The visit ended with participation in the theological symposium “Synodal Spirit and the Church in China: Communion, Participation, Mission” (see entry of November 15–16, 2023). The trip, which was originally scheduled to last five days – which is how long Cardinal Chow’s visit to Beijing lasted – was ultimately shortened to three days (*AsiaNews* Nov. 13; *Fides* Nov. 17; *Sunday Examiner* Nov. 13, 17; *Vatican News* Nov. 18; [www.news.mingpao.com](http://www.news.mingpao.com) Nov. 19; <https://catholic.org.hk/en/press-release/>; [www.chinacatholic.cn](http://www.chinacatholic.cn) Nov. 21). *kf*



November 13–17, 2023:

## Third International Conference for Chinese Permanent Deacons in Hong Kong

The theme of the conference was “The New Evangelization and Permanent Diaconate.” The focus was on the various ministries of Chinese permanent deacons throughout the world and plans for the next five years. Fr. Dominic Chan Chi-ming, chairman of the Hong Kong Diocesan Commission for the Permanent Diaconate, said in advance that the issue was how permanent deacons could continue their mission of evangelization and what that mission means in the modern world, according to the *Sunday Examiner* on November 10. According to Fr. Chan, since Cardinal John Baptist Wu Cheng-chung established the permanent diaconate three decades ago, the permanent deacons in Hong Kong have been particularly involved in charitable work, serving the needy, and the new evangelization. For example, the permanent deacons would regularly visit inmates in the 20 prisons in Hong Kong. A focus is also on low-income families, workers, and patients in hospitals.

The conference was attended by 96 people, including Chinese permanent deacons and their wives from the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong, as well as representatives from the dioceses of Taipei, Beijing, and Macao who wanted to learn more about the permanent diaconate. Cardinal Stephan Chow SJ gave a speech on the first day of the conference and presided over a Mass of thanksgiving. He said in his opening statement, according to the November 17 *Sunday Examiner*, “that women’s ordination as deacons was one of the topics that was discussed at the recent synod and that the Church continued to examine the issue from a theological and functional perspective.” He emphasized the important role of deacons: “How does our Church support the poor, the orphans, the homeless people, the inmates in the prisons and the sick? It is the way we accompany them and support them that can touch people’s hearts. A permanent deacon’s role should be to live out the gospel and bring about changes in society,” the cardinal observed. He thanked the permanent deacons present and their wives for their contribution.

Archbishop Thomas Chung An-zu of Taipei celebrated Mass on the second day, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing OFM of Hong Kong on the last day. The conference took place at the Caritas Oswald Cheung International House and the Caritas Community Centre in Aberdeen. The five-day program included talks, group discussions, visits to different charity works in Hong Kong, and pilgrimage tours. The first and second world conferences for Chinese permanent deacons were held in Hong Kong in 2013 and in Toronto, Canada, in 2018 (*Sunday Examiner* Nov. 10, 17). *kf*

November 15–16, 2023:

## Third Symposium of Holy Spirit Study Centre and official Catholic bodies of the PRC

The third joint symposium of the Holy Spirit Study Centre and the Commission for Theological Research of the Official Chinese Bishops’ Conference and the Patriotic Association was held in Hong Kong on November 15 and 16. The topic was “Synodal Spirit and the Church in China: Communion, Participation, Mission,” which, according to the report on the official website of the two PRC committees, was the “Third Theological Symposium on the Sinicization of the Catholic Church.” The symposium was attended by 50 “experts and clerics” from the Mainland and Hong Kong churches, the report said. Cardinal John Tong, Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, gave the opening prayer, while Cardinal Chow, Bishop of Hong Kong, and Bishop Li Shan, President of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, Vice President of the Bishops’ Conference and Bishop of Beijing, delivered speeches. There was a total of nine lectures. The closing speeches were given by the Vicar General of Hong Kong, Peter Choy, and Bishop Yang Yongqiang, Vice Chairman of the Chinese Bishops’ Conference (who also tempo-

rarily took part in the World Synod in Rome). Cardinal Chow emphasized, thus the report, among other things, that the Church can further deepen its knowledge of synodality through dialogue and exchange and promote the process of Sinicization of the Church. Bishop Li Shan is quoted as saying that he hopes that missionary and pastoral work in the spirit of Sinicization will be promoted together and that the study of theological thinking and the healthy heritage of Catholicism in China will be promoted together in both places. Other speakers included Prof. You Bin, director of the Department of Religious Studies at Minzu University of China; Liu Guopeng, director of the Centre for Christian Studies at the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Zhou Tailiang, deputy secretary-general of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association; Fr. Li Jingxi, deputy head of the Commission for Theological Research of the Bishops' Conference and Patriotic Association; Prof. Zheng Xiaohui, Prof. Geng Zhanhe, and other professors from the Holy Spirit Study Seminary in Hong Kong. Participants agreed, according to the report, "that the seminar was very effective in that the two places shared the fruits and experiences of Catholicism in the area of Sinicization and improved co-operation between the mainland and Hong Kong churches in theological research ([www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/23110477-1.htm](http://www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/23110477-1.htm); for the first two symposia see *RCTC* 2022, No. 2, p. 14, and 2023, No. 1, p. 11). *kf*

## Taiwan

September 23, 2023:

### 80 years of diplomatic relations between the Republic of China and the Holy See

Since October 23, 1942, the Republic of China has maintained formal diplomatic relations with the Vatican. The 80th anniversary fell in 2022, but due to the pandemic, the official celebrations in Taiwan itself were postponed until 2023. On September 23, the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference in Taiwan and the Institute of Catholic Academic Research at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei held a symposium to mark the occasion. The symposium was moderated by Archbishop Stefano Mazzotti, Chargé d'affaires of the Holy See in Taipei, Bishop Peter Liu Cheng-chung, President of Fu Jen Catholic University, and Vincent Chiang Han-sun, then Rector of the university [the new rector from 4 January 2024 is Prof. Yi-Chen Lan]. In addition to a retrospective look at the past 80 years, current relationships and the possibilities for deepening future cooperation were discussed, *UCAN* said. The Apostolic Nunciature also held a reception to celebrate 10 years of Pope Francis' pontificate and the anniversary of bilateral relations. The reception was also attended by Taiwan's Prime Minister Chen Chien-jen, a Catholic, and the Foreign Ministry's Director of European Affairs, Vincent Yao. Archbishop Mazzotti highlighted the "excellent bilateral relations between the Vatican and Taiwan" over the past 80 years. As part of the 80th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the "Beautiful Taiwan, the Field of God" conference took place on July 11, 2022 at the Taiwan Embassy at the Vatican. Also as part of the 80th anniversary, the embassy opened the exhibition "Friendly Taiwan meets *Fratelli Tutti*. Calligraphy and Painting Exhibition" on July 1, 2022 (*UCAN* Oct. 16; see also *RCTC* 2022, No. 4, p. 18). *kf*

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## Ambivalent Civism: Evangelical Youth, Public Commitment, and Moral Conservatism in Taiwan

Juliette Duléry

### Introduction

In the 1990s, Protestant communities in Taiwan underwent a religious revival. This shift in the national Protestant landscape was not unique to the country, but rather started in the United States the same decade, during what became known as the “charismatic third wave.” Compared to its predecessors, what characterized this “renewal” was its emphasis on achieving socio-political transformation. The theocratic goal of this movement is to conquer the world and bring the end times, in order to establish the Kingdom of God on earth (Gagné 2024).

In Taiwan, this revival took place during the period of democratization that followed the end of the martial law era. The country’s policy of religious *laissez-faire* (Laliberté 2009) benefitted the evangelical and charismatic movements, which, through their connection to transnational networks from South Korea, Singapore, and the United States (Rubinstein 1991; Iap – Sween 2015; Yang *et al.* 2017; Huang 2017; Lin 2020), gained influence in the country’s religious and political landscape. Indeed, although only 5.5% of the Taiwanese population is Protestant (Academia Sinica 2019), these believers are over-represented in middle and upper classes, and therefore have both direct and indirect influence over the debates and public policies of the country (Zhai *et al.* 2011). Moreover, charismatic and evangelical churches have attracted an increasing number of new believers in recent decades. Part of their success resides in the deep and individual relationship with God they promise to their believers (who are called to receive “spiritual gifts” such as speaking in tongues, healing prophecies, deliverance from demons). Another key factor lies in their adoption of growth and marketing techniques, helping them to retain and mobilize believers.

Sociologists of religions have documented, in other parts of the world, the role played by conservative Christian groups in creating and feeding illiberalism (Lo Mascolo 2024).

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The global trend of the “return of religion” in the public sphere is rooted (Casanova 1994; Zeng 2017), for evangelical believers, in a dominionist project of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth (Gonzalez 2014; Mahieddin 2018). Education plays a central role in this project. In interviews done for prior research (Duléry 2023),<sup>1</sup> I have found that some churches now specialize in the “mountain of education” and target the youth.

In the case of Taiwan, charismatic sinophone churches draw on contemporary Mandopop to attract the youth (Moskowitz 2009), and the growth of several charismatic mega-churches was fueled by their youth ministry and cultural outreach. This is the case of the New Life Church (Xin shengming xiaozu jiaohui 新生命小組教會), the Bread of Life Church (Taibei lingliang tang 台北靈糧堂), or the Hsin-tian Torch Church (Huoba jiaohui 火把教會) (Ho 2016; Huang 2017). The strategies described by church leaders in my interviews raise important questions for the relationship between Protestantism and education in Taiwan. Indeed, historically, Presbyterian groups promoted mass education in order to spread the gospel in China and Taiwan. At the turn of the 19th century, missionary work in China was part of a “civilizing mission” (Hirono 2008; Goossaert – Palmer 2011). Schools and hospitals were built, and Christianity was associated with an “education-transformation” process that resulted in the emergence of a new intelligentsia (Bil-lioud – Thoraval 2007; Jiang 2021). Today, however, it seems that the aim of evangelicals is not anymore to educate in order to convert, but to use education as a tool to permeate the secular society.

Contemporary evangelical and charismatic networks worldwide also connect education to new neoliberal spaces of training and personal development, such as artistic, entrepreneurial and cultural extra-curricular activities (Galonnier – Los Rios 2015). Popular culture is indeed a key area of development for these communities (Young 2012; Fer 2017). As an example, the rapid expansion of the Hillsong Church from Australia is linked to their music and youth ministry (Hynes 2013).

In this conference paper, I investigate the shifting modalities of Protestant influence over education. It will answer the following question: How do evangelical and charismatic educational practices translate into a socio-political goal to conquer the world?

To answer the research question outlined above, I am focusing on the case of the Taipei New Life Church, a charismatic church that targets young believers and has developed activities at all levels of the Taiwanese educational system. I have conducted a four-month fieldwork in Taipei (January to May 2018), where I have interviewed 41 church leaders and ordinary believers. I also rely on the data of my thesis, in which I have conducted 120 semi-directed interviews with religious leaders in various arenas of influence, mainly religion, business/corporate life, but also government/politics, arts/entertainment/media and the nonprofit/social sector, and family in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China (Duléry 2020; Duléry 2023). During this fieldwork research, I have discovered that these evangelical leaders are at the forefront of charismatic educational influence, even though they do not always recognize it publicly. The church is built next to the Taipei Fuhsing Private School (Taibei sili fuxing shiyan gaoji zhongxue 台北私立復興實驗高級中學), and the

<sup>1</sup> Interviews with an elder and a believer of the New Life Church, both company CEOs, Taipei, 2018.

New Life Church rents the school's facilities for the Sunday service. This is part of their strategy to influence this elite elementary institution.

The senior pastor of New Life Church, Abraham Ku, started his community in 1996. According to J. F., elder at New Life Church, Ku was previously a member of a “local church” in Taipei, the Congregation of Zhonghe (Zhonghe libaitang 中和禮拜堂).<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, the church experienced a charismatic transformation and became filled with the Holy Spirit, modeled on the charismatic “revival” of the South-Korean Yoido Full Gospel Church. Another influence from Singapore is the organization in cell groups and youth mission. After the leaders visited the Faith Community Baptist Church in Singapore, Ku adopted a cell group model, which provided an organizational base to mobilize the believers in order to transform society (Huang 2017). The City Harvest Church in Singapore is known for its glamorous leader Kong Hee and his Mandopop singer wife, Ho Yeow Sun (Huang 2017). After visiting this church, the senior pastor Abraham Ku declared that his mission is to “influence the entertainment industry and pop culture.” Taiwanese actors, singers, and entertainers have been massively converted to Christianity (Huang 2017).

In this conference paper, I will mainly focus on the preliminary results I have found about the tactics developed by leaders of New Life Church to influence the youth. First, I will analyze the role of the New Life Church as an educational provider at the grassroots level. Second, I will examine the various neoliberal strategies developed by the congregation to appeal to the youth. Third, I argue that inside the church, moral conservatism serves as a tool to transform young believers into obedient subjects and children.

## New Life Church as an Educational Provider at the Grassroots Level

Churches in Taiwan belong to the category of “nonprofit organizations” (*feiyingli zuzhi* 非營利組織) (Ho 2016), which refers to organizations that are neither companies nor public administrations and that belong to a “third space.” This fits with the strategy of New Life Church to shape society at the grassroots and community level and to provide multiple welfare services to the population, in the area of education, welfare, entertainment, and business. The believers of the church are “suburban warriors,” a term invented by Lisa McGirr to study the spiritual battle led by evangelical activists in the United States, who plant churches at the community level, in their homes, and in their companies – and within family associations and school boards (McGirr 2001). The mission of the church activists is to “enter and serve the district” (*fuwu* 服務), by organizing charity events for example, and inviting companies, the neighbors and their families to join (Ho 2016). The line between the company and the church has become fuzzy at the district level (Huang 2017).

The focus of New Life Church on education is not new for a Protestant community and shows that the community is rooted in a Protestant educational legacy. However, contrasting with the public role that the Presbyterian church in Taiwan used to play, the end of the martial law, followed by the so-called Taiwan “economic miracle” (1987), has opened up

2 J. Duléry, Interview, J. F., elder at New Life Church, Taipei, 2018.

new spaces for the expansion of evangelical communities, enabling them to develop new creative outreach tactics targeting the youth.

## Reaching Young Newcomers through Artistic, Professional, and Civic Training

As Protestant churches are not supposed to influence the secular society anymore, New Life Church has developed completely different strategies to attract the youth. The church has developed a more flexible and neoliberal repertoire of educational tactics. New Life Church seeks to conquer alternative and creative spaces of education, such as new media and pop culture.

First, New Life Church seeks to enter the space of the “new media” (*xinmeiti* 新媒體), to shape the youth culture that defines the mainstream culture (*liuxing wenhua* 流行文化). The strategy of the “Wall-less Church” has become even more central to New Life Church’s identity during the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> For the New Life Church leaders, the young believers are indeed “hidden in the cellphones.” The senior pastor, Abraham Ku, has also dyed his hair in purple to gain access to young believers. As a brand, New Life Church has built for example a fanbase on Facebook to advertise and promote its religious contents online. Young individuals thus become “followers” of the church. It increases the public notoriety of the church and makes the community more performant and efficient at a low cost.

Second, another way of attracting young believers is to “make the culture of the heavenly kingdom a mainstream culture.” New Life Church seeks to connect to pop culture. The church is known for having successfully converted hundreds of Taiwanese singers, artists, and entertainers. High-profile Taiwanese Mandopop singers such as Tsai Tsing or Chou Jie-lun are members of the community.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, the church also provides new artistic resources and training opportunities to attract young newcomers. The revival strategies of the community include the organization of fashion shows and of singing and dancing competitions. These extra-curricular activities contribute to the shaping of new talented and successful citizens.<sup>5</sup> The acquisition of artistic competences is seen as “gifts” bestowed by the Holy-Spirit. They define the norms of success through an ideal of talent and creativity.

Third, New Life Church seeks to conquer innovative business spaces such as the technology industry. Entrepreneurs are important brokers between the church and the young newcomers, as they can offer business resources to the community to mobilize young individuals. Professionals, artists, or businessmen who are members of the community “enter the schools” to organize extra-curricular workshops targeting young students. For example, the elder J. F., who is a key leader of New Life Church, is also the chief executive

3 J. Duléry, Interview, J. F., Taipei, 2018.

4 “The Christian Testimony of Tsai Ching,” Truelove blog, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CzSivAtD1U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CzSivAtD1U), accessed March 1, 2024.

5 J. Duléry, Interview, J. F., Taipei, 2018.

of an environmental engineering company.<sup>6</sup> He appears regularly in schools to teach students how to conduct an interview or how to write their curriculum vitae. After the class, he asks the students to hand in their curriculum vitae, so he can transfer it to Christian companies that are recruiting. New Life Church thus provides believers with an important network system to facilitate their first entry in the marketplace (Kwon *et al.*, 1997). The strategic use of business to convert young newcomers reflects the adoption by New Life Church of the business model of multi-level marketing, also known as relationship marketing or network marketing (Luca 2011). Multi-level marketing is a direct selling method that is rooted in the American evangelical business milieu. Adopting the business model of multi-level marketing, cell groups networking strategy involves the recruitment by the community leader of newcomers, who are integrated in the network of the church and have to prove their loyalty to the group by creating in turn a new cell group and by recruiting more disciples. The community thus generates new bonds between clients and employees.

P. C., another active member of the church whom I have met, is the chief executive of a French-Singaporean start-up specialized in the tech industry (Internet of things). He explained to me that each year, New Life Church organizes a national forum (*guoshi luntan* 國事論壇) with the support of the public administration at the city level.<sup>7</sup> The leaders of the community are invited to exhibit what they have done to educate the young believers. The main exhibitors are Christian leaders who work in the tech industry. The leaders of the virtual reality headset company HTC Vive are the main exhibitors. Municipal organizations of different cities such as Tainan, Yilan, New Taipei, and Chiayi are also invited to exhibit plans of the city of tomorrow. Public actors thus collaborate with religious ones to serve the youth and educate them to become responsible citizens and publicly engaged actors who are committed to new issues such as environment or technology.

Through these new alternative channels, the church can become an influential public actor, and can create new ties with the public administration as a grassroots religious organization. As new converts, young believers are also expected to commit themselves to the church's activities. By becoming members of New Life Church, they are, however, re-affiliated to new educational structures through the mediation of moral conservatism.

## Logics of Re-affiliation to Moral Conservatism

When they are recruited to a cell group, the young newcomers are affiliated to new religious networks and integrated into new interpersonal bonds (Bainbridge – Stark 1980). In the case of Taipei New Life Church, young believers are inserted into power relations that reproduce Confucian patriarchal ideals as well as age-based and gender-based norms, where the young individual has to show respect and adhere to the religious authority of older members and senior leaders of the church. Cell groups are divided into age groups, ranging from 0 to 100 years old, catering for primary students, middle school students,

<sup>6</sup> J. Duléry, Interview, J. F., Taipei, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> J. Duléry, Interview, P. C., Taipei, 2018. See also [www.newlife.org.tw/multi-media-2/church-youth-forum/](http://www.newlife.org.tw/multi-media-2/church-youth-forum/), accessed March 1, 2024.

high school students, university students, young professionals, parents, and retired persons. According to the elder J. F.:<sup>8</sup>

*The family is the core ... the father is the head of the family, he is the pastor of the community, he has to guide his children, to educate them. For example, I belong to a family [a cell group]. We hope that we can reach the two [age-]levels below us. We have to evangelize our neighbors, in particular those who are not married yet, or students from university to primary school. We have to reach the age groups that are below us. This way, a young individual will have a future. Otherwise, the believers I am connected with would all come from the same background as me, they would all have already built a home like me. If that was the case, it would be difficult to integrate young persons in the community. A church ages easily (laohua 老化).*

The educational values of New Life Church reflect a combination of Protestant and Confucian ideals. The cell group is the core unit where the young believers are educated to obey their elders. At the same time, they also have to commit to church activities in a neoliberal way, by undergoing artistic, entrepreneurial, and technological training or by serving in the public sphere and various events (national forums). The believers are integrated in religious networks but also learn their place. They are re-affiliated to traditional family values and age-based norms.

## Conclusion

In this conference paper, I have examined the commitment of young believers to the socio-political program set out by the evangelical New Life Church to conquer the world. The New Life Church provides various welfare services to the population at the grassroots level in order to influence society. In spite of its civic role in the Taiwanese public sphere, the New Life Church leaders have also imported neoliberal strategies in their community in order to attract young believers, by offering them artistic, professional, or civic training, and an opportunity to serve in their neighborhoods. Contrasted with the public role that the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan used to play regarding education, the New Life Church supports new educational venues at the extra-curricular level, and within both the public and private spheres. The objective of the church is to foster the education of responsible citizens, gifted and talented artists, and good children. At the community level, the shaping of the new generation is related to moral conservatism and to their re-affiliation to the church leaders' and parental figures' authority.

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## Adaptation of Religion – A Tool for Control, Fostering or Something Else?

Fredrik Fällman

“Adaptation of religion to socialist society” (*zongjiao yu shehuizhuyi shehui xiang shiying* 宗教与社会主义社会相适应) has been a policy in the PRC at least since the 1990s when Jiang Zemin first formulated what has been called “three sentences on religious work” (1993), later with an added fourth (2001). These four are the above-mentioned adaptation, the implementation of freedom of religious belief, the strengthening of leadership on religious work, and to insist on the principle of independence. It should be noted that “religious work” (*zongjiao gongzuo* 宗教工作) does not mean any activity by a religious group, but is the term for Communist Party (CPC) ideological work on religious issues. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, also under Hu Jintao, there was a stress to promote patriotism, reduce tension between believers and non-believers, play down (*danhua* 淡化) religious teachings that are “not in harmony with the development,” and to promote the “best traditions” (*youliang chuantong* 优良传统) of religions. Hu Jintao in 2007 also stressed the “positive function” (*jiji zuoyong* 积极作用) of religion.

While this may seem to be an adoption of a potentially more positive or at least pragmatic attitude towards religion in the PRC, it can also be interpreted as something else, with a tendency towards control or fostering. The phrase about “adaptation” includes the character *xiang* 相 which points towards a reciprocal relation between party-state and religious group, but cadre training material reveals that this aspect must not be taken literally and is potentially dangerous. This further underlines the “fostering” or “controlling” aspects of adaptation.

In the 1950s, the CPC recognized “five characteristics” of religion in China, mass character, ethnic character, international character, complex character, and long-term character. With the announcement of the plans for “Sinicization” (*Zhongguohua* 中国化) of religion in China in the 2010s, the adaptation process was taken a step further, and the “international character” seems to be forgotten or played down. From 2018, all officially recognized religions in the PRC have been required to adopt five-year plans for “Sinicization,” even Daoism which is inherently Chinese. This shows that it is not primarily about

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“adapting” to Chinese culture but to adapt to the demands of the party-state. The Daoist five year plan for Sinicization 2019–2023 mentions that religion has three dimensions, localism/regionalism (*diyuxing* 地域性), ethnic character (*minzuxing* 民族性), and contemporary character (*shidaixing* 时代性), nothing about international connections, masses or even complexity. Religions now also have “Chinese characteristics” (*Zhongguo tese* 中国特色), however without clear definitions. All terms and concepts are rather vague, making it easier to (re)define the content at the will of the party-state, which also seems to be the purpose. In 2021, Xi Jinping put forth his “Theory of party religious work in the new era” (*xin shidai dang de zongjiao gongzuo lilun* 新时代党的宗教工作理论) where he stresses the importance of religious work for the party-state overall, with continued strong leadership, Sinicization, stress on “uniting the masses” around the party-state, and raising the “rule-of-law-isation” (*fazhihua* 法治化) level of religious work.

Despite the many phrases and ambiguous concepts, there is a clear line and reasoning behind this that could be seen already during the time of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Both stressed how religion could be “useful” (*qi zuoyong* 起作用) and play a role for social harmony, as with Hu Jintao’s concept of “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会). In my analysis this is a kind of “reversed opium theory” in the sense that the CPC reverses original Marxist-Leninist theory. The party becomes the oppressor using religion to numb people into deference (as opposed to what Lenin wrote in 1905), and also seeks the effect traditions may bring, patriotism, harmony, social service, morality, and independence from outside interference. To push the limits, one may perhaps say that religion is seen as a “productive force.”

This is inferred from studying political texts and propaganda slogans, and parallel material to that directly involving religion can reveal further the greater and related process of “Sinicization” and the (re)creation of “excellent traditional Zhonghua culture” (*Zhonghua youxiu chuantong wenhua* 中华优秀传统文化). The promotion of “socialist core values” (*shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhi guan* 社会主义核心价值观) is also a part of this same nationalist tendency that goes through all of the above. From such texts one can see a clear differentiation between what is “best” or “good” (*youliang* 优良) and “excellent” (*youxiu* 优秀), and e.g. religion and ethnic minorities are always at the most “good” or “best” (*youliang*) traditions while anything *Zhonghua* 中华 or of the CPC is “excellent” (*youxiu*). The “socialist core values” are in many cases drawn from religious tradition, but are now requested to be “core” also for religions in China, in their current “adapted” form.

Expressions of adaptation take many forms, and one is how religious leaders regularly praise the CPC, even thanking the party for its “grace” (*gan dang en* 感党恩) and asking fellow believers to “strengthen the sincere feelings of love for the party, love for the country and love for socialism” (*zengqiang ai dang ai guo ai shehuizhuyi de zhenzhi qinghuai* 增强爱党爱国爱社会主义的真挚情怀) (Ma Yinglin 2021). This is a case not only of simply adapting to party demands, but an internalization of the party message on a higher level. Party representatives for their part have been talking about “reducing the burden of religious activity on believers” (*jianqing xinzhong zongjiao huodong fudan* 减轻信众宗教活动负担) (Zhu Weiqun 2015), which is actually a core statement in the whole “adaptation” process. The party seems to aim for less “religious” religions with greater social and

moral responsibility, being “useful” for social harmony and for contributing to the nationalist project of “excellent traditional Zhonghua culture.” The “Cultural Development Plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan” (“*Shisiwu*” *wenhua fazhan guihua* “十四五”文化发展规划) (PRC Government 2022b) argues to “continue to integrate basic Marxist principles with the concrete realities of China and with the excellent traditional Zhonghua culture” (*jianchi ba Makesizhuyi jiben yuanli tong Zhongguo juti shiji xiang jiehe, tong Zhonghua youxiu chuantong wenhua xiang jiehe* 坚持把马克思主义基本原理同中国具体实际相结合、同中华优秀传统文化相结合). This shows how not only religion is in an adaptation process, but even the cultural and ideological spheres, and there seems to be an interest in “traditionalism” but not really tradition. With the stress on the “usefulness” of religion, and the perceived need to control religion, it is also surprising to see so little mention of religion in other long term plans and campaigns, e.g. the National New-Type Urbanisation Plans (*xinxing chengzhenhua guihua* 新型城镇化规划) of 2014–2020 and 2021–2035 (PRC Government 2014 and 2022a) where there is no mention of religion at all. On the other hand, considering the non-reciprocal nature of the adaptation of religion, it is clear that religion has very little agency in the PRC, and therefore is non-visible except when the party wants it to be seen.

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## Wang Weifan (1927–2015): Theologian, Intellectual, Artist

Monika Gaenssbauer

In Wang Weifan 汪維藩 we meet a unique theologian, a free spirit deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, and a gifted poet and calligrapher. Wang is known in China not only as the author of spiritual texts. He dealt with China's early encounters with Christianity, investigated the effects of political campaigns from the 1950s to 1960s, and courageously voiced criticism where he recognized undesirable developments in his church.

### Biographical Information<sup>1</sup>

Wang was born in 1927 in Taizhou, Jiangsu. His mother was a devout Buddhist. Wang lost his father when he was seven and his mother when he was 17. On his deathbed, Wang's father, who had been an opium addict, asked Wang's mother to take her own life and the life of his son. The father was worried that they wouldn't be able to get by in life. But the mother acted against his will. Wang Weifan has often described the deep love of his mother that made him feel the love of God. Later experiences during the Sino-Japanese war tragically drove her to suicide.

In the house of a wealthy aunt Wang Weifan received his solid classical education. As an elementary school teacher he came into contact with Christianity and in 1947, while studying literature at the National Central University in Nanjing, Wang became a Christian. He studied at the Hangzhou Theological Seminary, which later joined a number of seminaries to form the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1952. He graduated from there in 1955.

During the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1958 he was criticized and sent to work in the countryside. After 1969 Wang was accused of espionage for the US and was sent to work in a factory. His situation in 1969 nearly drove him to suicide. He was separated from his wife and his children for eight years.

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1 For biographical information on Wang I am indebted to Isabel Hess-Friemann's article: "Wang Weifan. Evangelischer Theologe und Poet (1927–2015)," in: *China heute* 2015, no. 4, pp. 246-248.

After the Cultural Revolution Wang joined the faculty of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and became head of the publications department. He quickly rose as a popular teacher, prolific writer, and key theological thinker within the Chinese church. In 1989, during the Tian'anmen demonstrations, he sided with the students, which made him politically vulnerable.

He retired in 1999, in the midst of Bishop K.H. Ting's programme of theological reconstruction which Wang Weifan criticized quite openly. Wang Weifan passed away in the year 2015.

## Wang Weifan as Theologian

Wang Weifan describes God as the Lord of the cosmos and as life-giving God (*shengsheng shen* 生生神).<sup>2</sup> He argues that the intellectual basis for this idea can be found in the *Yijing* 易经 (*Book of Changes*) which is about the creation of the myriad of beings. For Wang the *Yijing* was the source of many Chinese thought traditions.<sup>3</sup> In his view it was not possible to understand Chinese culture without a basic understanding of the *Yijing*.

Change and constancy of everything is in God's hand.<sup>4</sup> This view of history can maintain an optimistic attitude towards the future of humanity. But it is not blind optimism, it includes a profound awareness of an unexpected development. Wang pointed out that for instance in peaceful times one must not forget the danger of losing peace. In prosperous times one should be aware of the possibility of perishing, and in times of a good government one needs to keep in mind that the situation might change to disorder and chaos.

For Wang, the life-giving God is constantly involved in the process of creation, recreation, and new creation of the entire cosmos. Wang understands salvation in terms of renewal of creation. He states: When Adam left Eden, the search of the creator God for human beings began. Just as the father in the parable of the prodigal son finds no rest until he can welcome the prodigal son home again.<sup>5</sup>

For Wang Weifan, Jesus was the one who perfected life (*wanshan shengming* 完善生命). In his view the God-man of Jesus Christ is easily understood in the Chinese context because in Chinese traditional culture there is a strong notion of the unity between heaven and human (*tian ren he yi* 天人合一).<sup>6</sup> Wang writes: Jesus Christ's obedience generated life, destroyed death, redeemed and fulfilled human life, and completed the variety of human goodness and beauty, in order to crown God's creation.<sup>7</sup> Wang's deep understanding of Jesus as the suffering servant is connected with the suffering Wang himself and the Christian church endured during many campaigns of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

2 Alexander Chow, "Wang Weifan's Cosmic Christ," in: *Modern Theology* 2016, no. 3, pp. 384-396.

3 Yuan Yijuan 袁益娟, *Shengsheng shenxue – Wang Weifan shenxue sixiang yanjiu* 生生神学—汪维藩神学思想研究 (Theology of the Life-giving God), Beijing 2010, p. 42.

4 Chen Yongtao, *The Chinese Christology of T.C. Chao*, Leiden 2017, p. 303.

5 Wang Weifan, *Die Weisheit der Lilien. Meditationen eines chinesischen Christen*, ed. and transl. by Monika Gänsbauer, Freiburg i.Br. 2010, p. 41.

6 Chen Yongtao, *The Chinese Christology of T.C. Chao*, p. 306.

7 Yuan Yijuan, *Shengsheng shenxue*, p. 87.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 106.



In the year 2007, Wang Weifan had sent me an unpublished chain letter. This chain letter sheds a very personal light on the political movements of the 1950s and on a period of Chinese (church) history that is often completely left out in publications on Chinese (church) history.<sup>9</sup>

Immediately after the founding of the PRC, the CCP began using mass campaigns. In these campaigns the political elite mobilized the population in order to unleash a broad initiative, to fight against certain political currents or to secure their own rule.

In the spring of 1957, in order to win over the country's educated class, the Chinese leadership initiated the so-called Hundred Flowers Movement in order to encourage more freedom of expression. Soon, however, in the view of the party-state leaders the criticism went too far. In June 1957, the Anti-Rightist Campaign was launched in which all those who had expressed open criticism were punished. By 1958, more than half a million people were sent to the countryside or to factories in order to be re-educated through manual labor. Wang Weifan was one of them.

The chain letter that Wang Weifan had sent me had been a means of communication for a group of young Chinese theologians during the years 1955 to 1958. Ideally, one letter should reach all members of the group, and each member could add a comment to the already existing letter content.

In 1958, the chain letter led to harsh criticism of the group and ended up in the archives of the United Front Department of Nanjing. In 1979, it was returned to Wang Weifan.

In the following I would like to present contents of the chain letter in excerpts:

In 1955, Wang informed his colleagues about the crime that an evangelist was accused of. He was denounced as a spy who allegedly passed on information about the Chinese army to foreign countries. Such imperialistic theological thinking must be fought against, writes Wang.

Whether people would still come to church services after the establishment of the agricultural production cooperatives is a question that another theologian takes up. In one cooperative, the pastor was attacked by a crowd of people because he had left work in order to pray at the bedside of a parish member who was seriously ill. The pastor writes that he is grateful for the criticism and knows now that it is downright counter-revolutionary to pray for healing. His conclusion is: The Lord has educated me through the masses.

In 1956, Wang reported that his father-in-law was arrested as a counter-revolutionary. Wang reports that his wife "behaved correctly" and distanced herself from her father. In December of that year one of the pastors turns away from Christianity. He tells his former colleagues that he has become aware that God does not exist.

In 1958, a pastor reported about plans to build a church that had been stopped by the party. He writes: "The instructions given by the party are correct ... the party has a broader perspective, we Christians, on the other hand, only have a partial view."

The last entry in the chain letter dates from March 1958.

9 Monika Gänssbauer, "Wir begrüßen die Entlarvung der Konterrevolutionäre ...? – Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung eines chinesischen Theologen," in: *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* 2009, Berlin 2009, pp. 49-64.

This chain letter is a very personal and surely painful document. I find it remarkable that Wang Weifan sent me this letter and thus opened up space for reflection. His comment accompanying the letter was that it is worthwhile to reflect on the traces of the past.

Wang, in my view, introduces a third perspective on dealing with the past in China. He does not follow the tradition of completely leaving out the experiences of the decades of the 1950s to 1970s that can often be found in China. Neither does he follow a narrative of exculpation. He does not present himself as a pure victim of the political campaigns of these decades. His aim is to document. But what is documented here also shows his own misjudgements and wrongdoings. Wang places the events in the narrative of his Christian faith which acknowledges failure in life but also offers forgiveness. This is an important contribution to memory discourses in China.

## Wang Weifan as Intellectual

In a text of 2015 that is dedicated to Wang's thoughts and ministry, Chen Xun focuses on Wang Weifan's contribution to a humanistic tradition.<sup>10</sup> As Chen points out, Wang connected the humanistic tradition with the spirit of his Christian faith. His writing is characterized by empathy, a sense of responsibility, and literary aesthetics. Wang has regularly been using the form of scholarly essay (*xueshu sanwen* 学术散文).<sup>11</sup>

Wang resisted a trend of systematization in writing because he feared that this might lead to mechanization (*jixiehua* 机械化). Questions about what makes a human being human, and how one ought to treat other people were at the centre of his reflections.<sup>12</sup>

For Wang, patriotism meant standing on the side of the people. He once wrote: "The Lord has redeemed us, but this doesn't mean that we should stay away from the people. As someone who belongs to the Lord one must not renounce the world but instead do good for humanity and society."<sup>13</sup>

In Wang's view, the suffering of the church from the 1950s through the 1970s helped Christians in China to unite with the people and no longer drift apart from their people.<sup>14</sup>

Wang connected the sufferings of the peoples of Asia in modern times with the lamentation of the prophets of Israel. In the 1980s he wrote: "A people that is not devoted to reflecting deeply will run the risk of following someone or something blindly and is in danger of losing itself."<sup>15</sup>

In the 1980s, Wang also took up issues of religious policy. He pointed out that one should not treat all unregistered Christian communities as illegal. There could be many

10 Chen Xun 陳馴, "Yituan liehuo – Wang Weifan renxue tanjiu" 一團烈火—汪維藩人學探究 (A Blaze – An Exploration of Wang Weifan's Anthropology), in: Yao Xiyi 姚西伊 *et al.* (eds.), *Geng fu zhi, chi zi xin. Wang Weifan sixiang yu shigong zhi yanjiu* 更夫志, 赤子心. 汪維藩思想與事工之研究 (The Aspiration of a Night Watchman, and a Pure Heart. A Study on Wang Weifan's Thoughts and Ministry), Hong Kong 2015, pp. 101-138.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Yuan Yijuan, *Shengsheng shenxue*, p. 181.

14 Kevin Yao Xiyi, "Wang Wei-fan's Evangelical Theology," in: Paulus Huang (ed.), *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2016*, Leiden 2016, pp. 3-16, here p. 7.

15 Chen Xun, "Yituan liehuo – Wang Weifan renxue tanjiu," p. 131.

reasons why Christian groups would not want to join the patriotic Three-Self-Organization. He pleaded for a generous attitude.

In 1982, he criticized the wording of negative religious freedom in the Constitution: “In the Constitution we do not find a passage added to the declaration of freedom of opinion, information, publication and assembly that states that citizens have the freedom not to speak their own mind, or not to publish and not to gather. Only to the sentence that citizens have the freedom to have a religious belief, a passage was added: citizens of the PRC shall enjoy freedom not to have religious belief. This hurts the feelings of believers.”<sup>16</sup>

Today’s formulation in the Constitution is as follows:

“Citizens of the PRC shall enjoy freedom of religious belief.

“No state organ, social organization or individual shall coerce citizens to believe in or not to believe in any religion ...”<sup>17</sup>

In 2010, Wang wrote: Our time urgently needs a spiritual renewal. This includes ethics and morals, a civic spirit, social conscience and trust in our faith. Only if China would reform itself politically and make progress intellectually, would there be a better tomorrow.

Wang did not see a contrast between Christianity and Chinese culture. On the contrary, he stated: It is reckless and arrogant to evangelize the country without respecting and understanding its cultural tradition first.<sup>18</sup>

He described traditional Chinese culture as a mother that can nurture Chinese theology. For him, the low regard for traditional Chinese culture was one reason for the poverty of Chinese theology.<sup>19</sup> He saw “culture as a mirror, different cultures being different mirrors. But in each mirror alike we find some aspect of Christ reflected.”<sup>20</sup>

Wang writes at one point that Chan Buddhism has influenced him strongly – for example with its preoccupation with riddles that cannot be explained (*gongan* 公案). He has repeatedly circled the mystery of God in texts that are deeply memorable. Yuan Yijuan has also pointed out Daoist influences on Wang’s writing. The Daoists were deeply aware of the limits of language and their texts are often connected with mysticism. Wang Weifan also was of the opinion that there is a limit to what can be said about God.<sup>21</sup>

He draws on other sources of Chinese tradition, too. In one text he quotes Confucius’ saying: “While you do not know life, how can you know death” (*wei zhi sheng yan zhi si* 未知生焉知死). And he continues as follows: “Christians know life and death through Christ. Life in its prolongation leads to death. This is the beginning of life on a higher level. For Christians it is more important to know life than to know death.”<sup>22</sup>

16 See: Monika Gänsbauer, *Parteistaat und Protestantische Kirche. Religionspolitik im nachmaoistischen China*, Frankfurt a.M. 2004, pp. 62-63.

17 “Constitution of the People’s Republic of China,” see: [www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/2007-11/15/content\\_1372964.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/2007-11/15/content_1372964.htm) (as accessed on Oct. 9, 2023).

18 Cited in: Kevin Yao Xiyi, “Wang Wei-fan’s Evangelical Theology,” p. 11.

19 Isabel Hess-Friemann, “Wang Weifan. Evangelischer Theologe und Poet (1927–2015),” p. 248.

20 Yuan Yijuan, *Shengsheng shenxue*, p. 102.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

## Wang Weifan as the Author of Spiritual Texts and as Calligrapher

In 1988, a collection of Wang Weifan's meditations, translated into English by Janice and Philip Wickeri, was published. The title of this collection is *Lilies of the Field*.<sup>23</sup>

I myself have translated a collection of Wang's meditations into German.<sup>24</sup> The book entitled *Die Weisheit der Lilien* was published in 2010. In that publication we chose a few meditations that were also included in *Lilies of the Field* but the texts for my translation were chosen mostly from two collections which Wang Weifan had published in Chinese.

Wang Weifan who was a gifted calligrapher even contributed a few calligraphies to *Die Weisheit der Lilien*.

At the end of this brief article I would like to let two of Wang's meditations speak for themselves:

The first is on Matthew 6:28:

### Lilies of the Field<sup>25</sup>

*The beauty of life does not lie in what we put on, but in bearing life's hardships without losing sight of its charm, in encountering the vagaries of the world without losing sight of its beauty.*

*The adornments that the father gives to his daughters and sons are carved and painted in the deepest recesses of the soul.*

*The tiny flowers of the field ask nothing for themselves and covet nothing. They are silent; but in their silence, they adorn the field. Their lives are brief; they appear quickly, go quickly. Yet what remains is their fragrance which they leave behind to the land that nourished them.*

The second meditation is on the topic of ascension:

### Why Do You Stand Looking into Heaven? (Acts 1:11)<sup>26</sup>

*Why do you stand looking into heaven?*

*Though Jesus Christ has ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God, he is still in our hearts, yours and mine. Christ surrounds us. He listens and is watching. The hands of Jesus Christ still soothe our wounds, yours and mine.*

23 Wang, Weifan, *Lilies of the Field. Meditations for the Church Year*, transl. and ed. by Janice and Philip Wickeri, Nashville 1993.

24 Wang Weifan, *Die Weisheit der Lilien. Meditationen eines chinesischen Christen*, ed. and transl. by Monika Gänsbauer, Freiburg i.Br. 2010.

25 Wang Weifan, *Lilies of the Field. Meditations for the Church Year*, p. 9.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

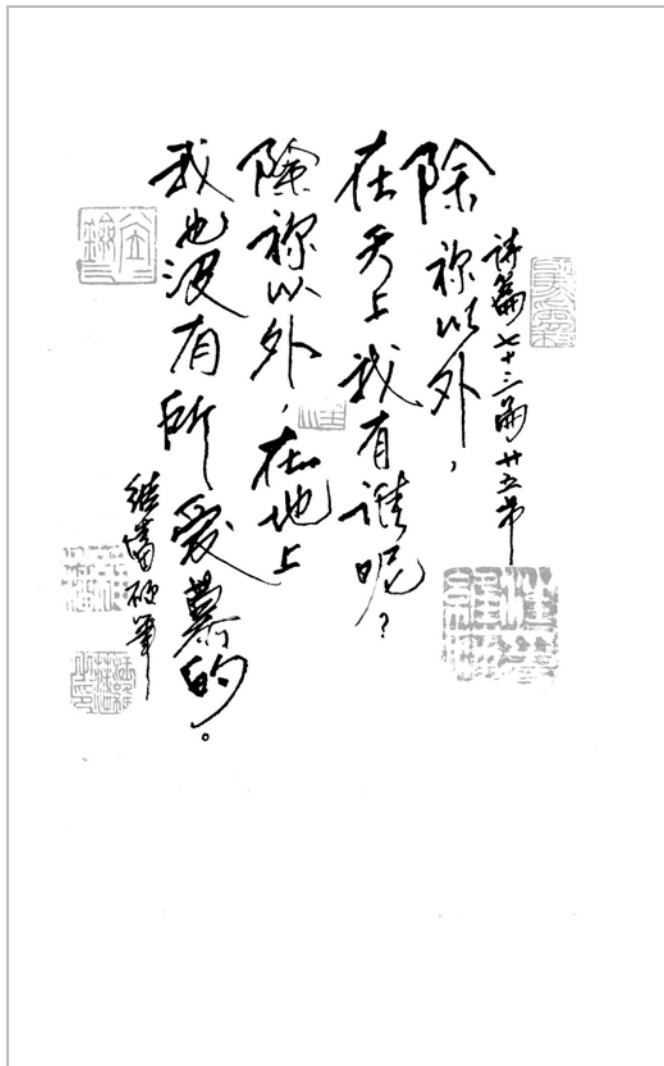
*A rising sun, Christ ascends to heaven, emitting light that covers the mountains and fills the valleys. Jesus Christ is our North Star, brilliant and crystal clear, glimmering in the far reaches of the cosmos, guiding us home, you and me.*

*Christ, who has transcended time and space, still remains within creation and history. Christ upholds creation and guides human history. All that came from God is in the end guided back to God through Christ.*

*Our life is already in Christ and yet remains hidden within God. It unfolds in heaven and on earth as a drama played for the angels and the world to see.*

## Concluding Remarks

As mentioned at the beginning of this contribution, I see Wang Weifan as a unique Chinese theologian and intellectual who developed his very own strands of thought that combine his faith with Chinese traditions in a personal way. It is lamentable that in today's China his theology is not given as much attention as would be desirable.



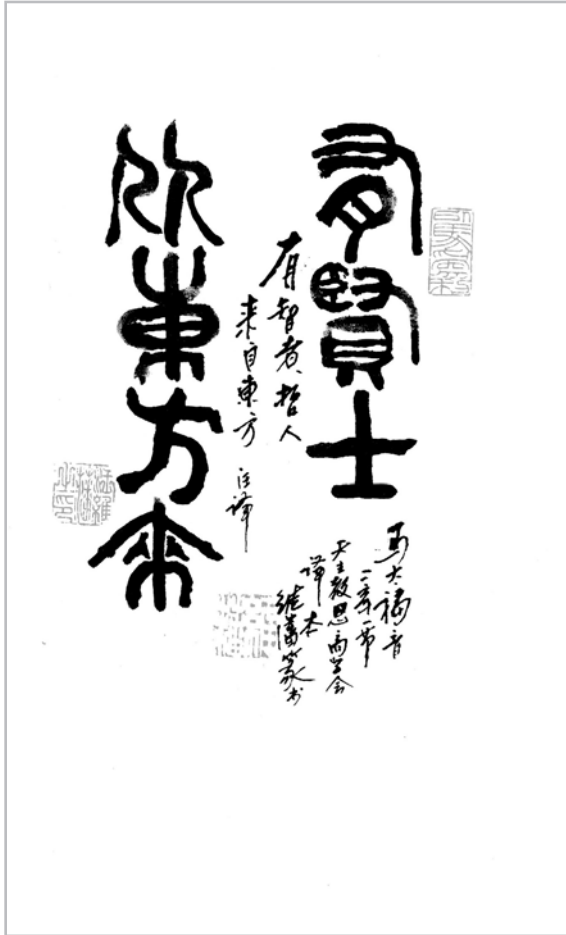
"Whom have I in heaven but you?"

And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you."

Psalm 73:25

Calligraphy by Wang Weifan.

Photo: Monika Gaenssbauer.



"Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem."  
Matthew 2:1  
Calligraphy by Wang Weifan.  
Photo: Monika Gaenssbauer.



Easter Meditation: "He is not here."  
Calligraphy by Wang Weifan.  
Photo: Monika Gaenssbauer.

## Life Education in Contemporary Greater China – Are Religions Back as Players in Public Education?

*Esther-Maria Guggenmos*

In the past 20 years, the subject “Life Education” (*shengming jiaoyu* 生命教育) has become an optional standard in secondary schools in Taiwan; official textbooks on Life Education can be found at the National Textbook Library, and a research center on Life Education at National Taiwan University has been set up and publishes an in the meantime established *Journal of Life Education*. Religious agents have become self-confident in assisting the general development of the subject. How can one describe this emerging subject and its regional differences? How can it be historically contextualized? In how far does it relate to religion? And are religious organizations playing a role in its establishment? These are the questions of a new research project at Lund University, the first steps of which Esther-Maria Guggenmos introduced in her paper.

Since the late 1990s, Life Education has been gradually implemented at public schools in Chinese-speaking regions, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and Mainland China. One might talk about an educational movement across shores despite contrasting political systems. When reflecting on the motivation behind the implementation of the new subject, it is often stressed that the educational system in East Asia emphasizes cognitive knowledge proven by success in examinations. Traditionally, “learning” was and remains one of the pillars of Confucian traditions. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the civil service examination system was core to the functioning of the Chinese Empire. With little space for personal reflection, students are under performance pressure in East Asia also today. In Taiwan, for the year 2017, within the group of 15–24 year-old students accidents and suicides are the top two causes of death (The News Press of the Ministry of Health and Welfare 2018). The situation was already considered alarming about twenty years ago. Taiwan promoted the development of Life Education with emphasis and is the only region among the four mentioned in which the subject is compulsory as a credit-bearing course in the senior secondary curriculum. Five elements of Life Education have been defined in Taiwan today that comprise religious, health, career, ethical, as well as “life-and-death” education.

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The rise of Life Education goes along with the emergence of political and research institutions fostering Life Education. In 1998, the former Department of Education of the Republic of China, Taiwan, founded its “Life Education Center” and established a respective committee in 2001 – a year that the ministry declared as the “Year of Life Education,” emphasizing their new agenda. Simultaneously, The Chinese University of Hong Kong stressed the importance of “Education for Quality Life” in the context of religious education raising the “public’s awareness of life education” (Lee – Yip – Kong 2021, p. 9). Taiwan can be seen as a forerunner in the implementation of Life Education, and the government reached out to academia to accompany its developmental process. Since it has been prioritized on the agenda of educational politics in Taiwan, there has been a considerable amount of academic reflection to date that assists in shaping the new subject, its content, and pedagogical formation.

The involvement of religious actors in this field is regionally distinct. In Mainland China as well as in Taiwan, religious education was in the past decades and is to this date officially not part of the school curriculum, as school education is regarded as secular. A state-driven secularisation process emphasises moral, civil, and ethnic elements instead of religious education (Zhao – Hunzai 2022). Public education is also differing across provinces. With the development of Life Education, we see in Taiwan for the first time religious communities engaging in curricular development. While organizations are allowed to open schools from a religious motivation (currently about 2% of primary schools and about 19% of secondary schools are operated by religious bodies, Cheung 2022, p. 29), none of their religious activities must be compulsory. Central to religious education in Taiwan is the Educational Fundamental Act (*Jiaoyu jiben fa* 教育基本法) which prohibits public schools from engaging in “promotional or other activities for any specific religion or belief” (Educational Fundamental Act, Art. 6, <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=H0020045>, accessed Feb. 24, 2024). Religion is regarded as a private matter in Taiwan. Tolerating and even inviting religious communities in the creation of teaching material for public schools reflects a social change where especially Buddhist and Christian religious agents find themselves in new roles. In the case of Hong Kong and also Macao, the situation is shaped by a colonial heritage and the increasing alignment to Mainland politics in the past twenty years, which leads to a “repackaging” of religious education in the form of Life Education (Ho 2022, p. 50; see also Tse 2021). In Hong Kong today, Christian, Buddhist, Daoist, and Muslim communities offer public education. Colonial history led to the larger impact of Christian missionary schools, but since 2004, schools subsidized by religious bodies must form a management committee independent from their sponsoring bodies. Life Education in this context can serve as a “back-up plan” for religious organizations – a process described for Methodist Church primary schools (Tse 2020, esp. p. 105).

The complex entanglement between religions and education builds upon a longer history: With the advent of Chinese modernity around 1900, major shifts in mental maps occur. Probably through the translatory efforts of Japanese literati, the term *zongjiao* 宗教 is introduced into East Asian languages as a neologism for the hitherto unknown word “religion,” and “a self-consciously ‘religious’ field was opened in China, both by Christian mis-



sionaries and by secularizing political reformers and revolutionaries” (Goossaert – Palmer 2010, p. 10; on the emergence of *zongjiao* see also Goossaert 2006, 2007, Barrett – Tarocco 2012, Horii 2017, Meyer 2020). “Religion” served as a functional and political term that did not reflect socially developed categories of distinction. Whether it was Nationalists or Socialists, “religion” was something seen with caution and suspicion, of colonial flavour, and certainly something that could not provide the moral and value orientation “Confucianism” in its variations and the connected civil service examinations had secured over centuries. Nationalists and Socialists alike aimed at the renewal of morality among citizens and regulating religion was a necessity, a “political civilizing project” that aimed at replacing established forms of religion (see Goossaert – Palmer 2010, pp. 167-198). Moral education and classes about citizenship are therefore part of regular public education – whether in Taiwan or Mainland China. That “religions” could be essential for the moral orientation of citizens is a thought more or less alien to the intellectual history of Imperial China that echoes thereafter.

Therefore, research on Life Education and religious agency wins its topicality especially in relation to its historical background: On the one hand, East Asian moral education has a long-standing tradition broadly independent from religious players but rich in Confucian heritage. On the other hand, through Christian missionaries and Buddhist organizations, and the current engagement of religious organizations in Life Education, religious organizations help to realise educational goals and shape the worldview and mindset of pupils. Political trust in religious organizations seems to increase in the case of Taiwan, religious agents are more confident in shaping the future of Hong Kong due to their colonial heritage, while on the Mainland the situation is most distanced towards religious players. This amalgam leads to oscillations and notions of ambiguity across Greater China as Life Education proves to be a perfect lens through which we can trace the transformation and reformulation of the “religious” field in contemporary East Asian societies.

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## Breaking Barriers: Women, Education, and Evangelization in Kulangsu International Settlement

Huang Zhicang

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Qing dynasty faced numerous crises stemming from both interior regions and coastal areas. Internally, the dramatic increase in population from last century fuelled emigration and heightened societal tensions, presenting considerable governance challenges. Externally, the late 18<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of an escalation in the opium trade along the coastlines. The expansion caused multiple confrontations with foreign powers, culminating in the Opium Wars. The aftermath of these conflicts resulted in China becoming more open to foreign influences and decriminalization of missionary activities within the country. A succession of agreements continuously reshaped the religious rights in China. The Treaty of Nanjing indirectly contributed to the spread of Christian doctrines. The Huangpu Treaty granted Western powers the rights to engage in missionary activities in China and to establish churches in coastal port cities. Furthermore, the Treaty of Tianjin expanded these provisions, allowing Christianity to be freely disseminated throughout the inland territories of China and mandating non-interference by Chinese officials with missionaries. The advocacy and support of Western powers, churches, and governments behind missions to the East contributed to the rapid development of Christianity in China.

The emergence of the Concessions as “a paradise of adventurers”<sup>1</sup> first came to attention in the wake of the Opium Wars. It was a period that not only enhanced China’s involvement into international trade but also exposed it to geopolitical vulnerabilities and compelled a degree of cultural assimilation. Xiamen, a port city with strategic geographic advantages, has long been a focal point of international interest and was among the inaugural Chinese ports to embrace foreign trade. With its opening, two concessions were founded. The first was a coastal area ceded to the British government, known as the Xiamen Bund. It primarily served commercial purposes with an array of offices, warehouses, and various enterprises. The second concession, the Kulangsu International Settlement, was an island

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1 Description from G.E. Miller’s book, *Shanghai, the Paradise of Adventurers*, New York: Orsay Publishing House Incorporated 1937.

of cultural diversity and a preferred residential area for foreigners. This settlement stood out as a unique cosmopolitan enclave, blending varied cultural influences and ways of life.

During the age of exploration, Dominican missionaries capitalized on the Spanish colonial expansion to traverse eastward, promoting and disseminating their religious beliefs. The work of figures like Francisco Zea and Manuel Prat Pujoldevall were instrumental in establishing the Dominican presence in Kulangsu. Francisco Zea's early undertaking in transforming a ruined house into a church and engaging with the heterogeneous communities on the island laid the groundwork for future missionary work. Manuel Prat Pujoldevall, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, expanded these efforts by constructing new churches, establishing schools, and launching periodicals. The school founded under his guidance primarily enrolled female students, integrated cultural, religious, and music education, while also mandating weekly Mass attendance. The educational institution was led by women equipped with specialized training. He employed a multifaceted approach to propagate the mission, with an emphasis on education and the nurturing of Christian values.<sup>2</sup>

For the missionaries representing diverse churches who successively arrived in Xiamen, a common initial task of their work was local language acquisition. This required their meticulous attention to the speech of native language users, dissecting unfamiliar phonetics, lexicon, and transcribing these orally conveyed tongues into written records. Their efforts led to an extensive collection of linguistic documentation, including dictionaries, syntax guides, and teaching manuals. While preaching in Xiamen, the missionaries encountered the obstacle of low education levels and widespread illiteracy among the local inhabitants. To overcome this, they devised a set of spelling rules, including a system to transcribe the Southern Fujian dialect, commonly referred to in Chinese as *baihua zi* 白话字. The method converted Chinese ideograms into Romanized script, akin to *pinyin* 拼音, facilitating a fast learning process by beginners within mere months. It was taught in primary schools, in churches on Sundays, and in homes on weekdays.

Within the broader context of the sanctioned missionary activities, a substantial influx of missionaries into the treaty ports provided a vantage point to closely observe the everyday lives of the common people and to come into close contact with Chinese traditions, precipitating a series of cultural shocks. A notable manifestation of this period in Xiamen was the campaign movement against foot binding, decried as the “cultural distortion”, spearheaded by the couple John MacGowan, who were affiliated with the London Missionary Society and resided on Kulangsu. Following the anti-foot binding initiatives, the MacGowans established The Heavenly Foot Society (drawing on the term “tianzu” 天足, meaning “natural feet”). This organization served as a voluntary nexus for reform, inviting participants without compulsion. It became a forum for engaging dialogues, challenging entrenched cultural mores and advocating for the abolition of foot binding – a practice both deeply rooted and controversial within the community.

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2 Information about Bishop Manuel Prat Pujoldevall (1873–1947) and his missionary activities in Fujian Province can be found in the Archivo de la Provincia Dominicana del Santo Rosario [Archive of the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary], section 34, Spain.

In terms of its impact, the campaign was undoubtedly successful; their efforts not only secured support within the Island but also echoed throughout China, transforming the anti-foot binding movement into an emblem in the wider crusade for women's rights and liberation. The educational establishments on Kulangsu arose as a hub for the propagation of these forward-thinking ideologies, empowering women to critically evaluate and contest longstanding society norms. However, this movement, propelled by missionaries and progressive intellectuals, encountered resistance due to insufficient engagement with the ingrained local traditions, particularly those affecting women with bound feet. Still, this recognition and realization steered China towards modernity and ultimately became as an element in shaping the ideology of the contemporary nation-state as more inclusive and enlightened.

In addressing the critical issue of female infanticide in Xiamen, missionaries embarked on a dual-purpose mission by adopting abandoned infant girls. This act of care necessitated the establishment of educational institutions and orphanages which served both as centres for modern education and as platforms for religious indoctrination. This strategic integration was indicative of the missionaries' broader objective: the dissemination of Christianity alongside the provision of modern learning. For the women in the Kulangsu region, the missionary-led educational reforms represented a gateway to modern education. These reforms instigated a transformation in societal norms and values, fostering an environment for a unique cultural synthesis that integrated Eastern and Western traditions. The introduction of Western educational paradigms was a key factor in catalysing social change and evolution. It ushered in a new era of advanced thought among the local populace. This transformation in concept extended beyond the confines of the Island and influenced adjacent areas, thereby contributing to widespread cultural shifts in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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