

News Update on Religion and Church in China November 28, 2022 – March 26, 2023

Compiled by Katharina Feith, Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle) and Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, with a contribution by Liu Ruomin
Translated by Fr. 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). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2023, No. 1, pp. 3-12) covered the period October 16 – December 7, 2022.

Religious Policy

December 13, 2022:

ChinaFile reports on government tenders for flagpoles for religious sites in relation to the “Four-Enter” Campaign

In May 2018, the religious-political “Four-Enter” (四进) campaign started, it began with Islam (see RCTC 2018, No. 3, p. 12) and was soon extended to all religions. “Four-Enter” means that the following four things should be present at every religious site: 1. the national flag; 2. China’s Constitution, laws and legal norms; 3. the core socialist values; 4. the outstanding traditional culture of China. *ChinaFile* – an online journal of the Asia Society based in New York – evaluated eight procurement notices issued by local authorities in Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai and Sichuan between 2018 and 2021 on behalf of the “Four-Enter” campaign. Above all, these procurement notices show the enormous sums that the authorities have invested in acquiring appropriate equipment for the religious sites. For example, in 2018, the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau of Tongxin County, Wuzhong City, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region spent RMB 1,072,184 on acquiring and installing promotional window display boards for the “Four-Enter” campaign. (1 million RMB equals about 133,000 Euro today). Twice the Linxia City Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau in the Linxia Hui Autonomous County of Gansu Province procured flagpoles for the “Four-Enter” Action: 70 twelve-meter-high and 10 nine-meter-high poles with flagpole platforms and flags in 2018 and 80 twelve-meter poles with platforms and flags in 2019, both times for over RMB 1.1 million. The procurement of 130 different book titles for “Four-Enter” religious sites, each in a quantity of 126 copies, cost the Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs of Pengyang County, Guyuan City, Ningxia in 2019 a total of 625,552 RMB. The tenders presented by *ChinaFile* concern autonomous areas of the Hui (i.e. probably many mosques) or the Tibetans (monasteries are explicitly mentioned) (www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/notes-chinafile/)

planting-flag-mosques-and-monasteries). – Today, the national flag is hoisted in front of almost all religious sites in China. *kwt*

February 22, 2023:

Databases for Buddhist and Daoist religious clergy go online

As part of a public online database project by the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) on religions, searchable databases of Buddhist and Daoist religious personnel went online on February 22, 2023. The two research tools contain details of name, sex, religion, religious discipline and religious office, the serial number of the certificate for religious personnel, as well as a photo of the officially accredited and registered clergy of the two religions. Users have to verify their identity by using their mobile phone. Access from abroad was not possible. The NRAA's searchable databases for Buddhist and Daoist religious officials (佛教教职人员信息查询系统; 道教教职人员信息查询系统) and other databases of its "Search System for Basic Data on the Religions" can be found at www.sara.gov.cn/gjzjswj/zjccxcxt/index.shtml (last accessed on March 20, 2023). For more details see article in *China heute* 2023, No. 1, pp. 3-4 (in German). *kwt*

Beginning of March 2023:

Parents of kindergarten children in Longwan District of Wenzhou are required to sign a pledge not to believe in any religion

According to the ChinaAid organization and *Radio Free Asia*, both based in the US, many kindergartens in the Longwan District of Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province, uniformly issued pledge forms in early March, two of which were obtained by the authors of the reports. The reports present a photo of the "Longwan District Kindergarten No. 3 Family Commitment Statement, Wenzhou City" (温州市龙湾区第三幼儿园家庭不信教承诺书). It begins with the words: "In order to promote the civilized family, to build a harmonious home together [...], to strengthen Party discipline, to solve the problem of this 'main switch' for the world view, view of man and view of values, and to promote progressiveness and purity of the Party, [we] solemnly make the following promises." Parents must promise, among other things, "to stand firm in the world view of Marxist materialism, to increase atheistic upbringing and learning, not to believe in any religion, not to participate in any religious activities, and not to propagate and spread religion anywhere." The names of the child and the head of the family must be entered at the end of the form (chinaaid.org March 20, 2023; readable photo of the Commitment Statement at www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/shehui/sc-03162023090319.html).

In recent years, there have repeatedly been calls or commitment statements issued by local educational authorities or schools to the effect that minors are not allowed to believe in a religion nor to participate in religious activities. According to ChinaAid and *RFA*, however, this is the first time such commitments have been circulated in kindergartens. For information on state restrictions on the practice of religion by minors, see also *China heute* 2021, No. 4, pp. 207-210 (in German). *kwt*

March 4-11, 2023:

69 delegates from the religious circles in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)

Various parties, mass organizations and sectors of society are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). The constitutive meeting of the 14th CPPCC took place

from March 4 to 11. In its new composition, it has 69 delegates from the religious circles. As reported by the Catholic portal *Xinde (Faith)*, this is 3.18% of the 2,172 delegates. Of the 69 religious delegates, 25 are Buddhists, 12 Daoists, 12 Muslims, 11 Catholics and 9 Protestants. Religious delegates of the CPPCC usually hold positions in the official religious bodies. At the opening session on March 4, the leaders of the national religious organizations of the five religions sat on the podium. According to *Xinde*, for the Chinese Buddhist Association, these were its President, Master Yanjue, and the [official] Panchen Lama; for the Chinese Daoist Association, President Li Guangfu; for the Chinese Islamic Association, President Yang Faming and Vice President Adiljan Haj Kerim; for the Chinese Catholic “One Association and One Conference,” Presiding Bishops Li Shan (Patriotic Association) and Shen Bin (Bishops’ Conference) as well as Honorary President Bishop Fang Xingyao; for the Protestant “Two Bodies,” Pastor Xu Xiaohong (Three-Self Movement) and Pastor Wu Wei (Chinese Christian Council). The board of directors of the 65-strong Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee of the CPPCC has also been renewed: among its 13 vice-chairmen are the religious delegates Li Shan, Li Guangfu, Yang Faming, Xu Xiaohong and Yanjue. As for the Catholic CPPCC delegates, it is striking that Bishop Ma Yinglin, honorary chairman of the bishops’ conference, is no longer among them; his political career is obviously over.

The National People’s Congress (NPC) met parallel from March 5 to 13; it elected Xi Jinping president for the third time on March 10. Only a few of the NPC delegates are religious representatives. One of them is the Catholic bishop of Shantou, Huang Bingzhang (www.xinde.org/show/53486 with list of CPPCC religious delegates; www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/newcppcc/mzhzjwyh/index.shtml [nationalities and Religious Commission]; *xinde.org* March 10, 2023). *kwt*

March 13, 2023:

Zhumadian City (Henan Province) regulates rewards for reporting “illegal” religious activities

The religious affairs authority of Zhumadian City issued “Implementation Rules for Rewarding Reports of Illegal Religious Activities” on March 13. According to the document, citizens who report “illegal religious activities” to the authorities can receive a reward ranging from 100 to 1,200 RMB (about 13 to 160 Euro) depending on the “severity” of the case. The document, about which *AsiaNews* reported on March 28, is not found on the website of the Zhumadian religious affairs authority, but is circulating on various networks.

Similar local reward systems for reporting “illegal” religious activities have been reported from different parts of China for a number of years (see most recently *RCTC* 2021, No. 4, p. 6). Religious activities are illegal from the authorities’ point of view when they are carried out in unregistered places of religious activity and/or by unregistered religious personnel. This is the case, for example, with Protestant house churches. According to *AsiaNews*, 10% of Chinese Catholics live in Henan, with a strong Under-ground community. *kwt*

March 22, 2023:

Chen Ruifeng appointed new head of National Religious Affairs Administration – investigations launched into predecessor’s activities

On March 22, 2023, the appointment of Chen Ruifeng 陈瑞峰 as director of the National Religious Affairs Administration and Vice Minister of the United Front was made known. Chen, born in 1966,

comes from Shandong Province. He worked in the Propaganda Department (宣传部, newer official translation: Publicity Department) of the CPC Central Committee from 1990 to 2004 and 2014 to 2016, most recently as head of its Bureau of Propaganda and Education. From 2016 to 2020 he worked in Hubei Province and from 2020 to 2023 in Qinghai Province; in Qinghai he was head of the provincial propaganda department and party secretary of the provincial capital Xining. The appointment of a new NRAA director and vice minister of the United Front was pending after the incumbent Cui Maohu 崔茂虎 was removed from both posts on March 18, 2023, after just eight months. The Party's Central Discipline Inspection Commission and the National Supervision Commission announced on the same day that Cui is being investigated on "suspicion of serious violations of [Party] discipline and the law." This formulation usually refers to corruption. The allegations against Cui are said to relate to his work in Yunnan Province, where he was vice governor and party secretary of the province until June 2022 (*AsiaNews* March 20, 2023; *ccdi.gov.cn* March 18, 2023; *chinadaily.com.cn* March 22, 2023; *Sing Tao Daily* March 17, 2023; *Jingji ribao* [ce.cn] July 19, 2020.) *kwt*

March 24, 2023:

Draft of "Measures for the Management of Places of Religious Activity" published

The National Religious Affairs Administration published the draft for the purpose of soliciting opinions. Proposals for changes could be submitted until April 24, 2023. For observations concerning the content of the draft, see the *China heute* 2023, No. 1, pp. 4-5 (in German). *kwt*

Buddhism

January 26, 2023:

Tibetan monk dies in custody

56-year-old monk Geshe Lobsang Dhundup, also known as Phende Gyaltzen, from Jongwa, Lithang County, Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Sichuan), died of poor health from unknown causes while he was detained at the Lithang Police Station, according to a message on the website of the Tibetan government-in-exile (*tibet.net*). His death was also reported by *Radio Free Asia (RFA)* and other sources. Phende Gyaltzen was reportedly arrested in March of 2022. His involvement in the renovation of a monastery in Lithang and his role as a mediator in a conflict are suspected to be the reasons for his arrest. In July 2022, he was temporarily taken to a hospital in Lithang, but was then taken back to detention. A source in Tibet told *RFA* that Phende Gyaltzen was perfectly healthy before his detention. There are more reports of the detention of monks. Sometimes the details are not clear, as in the case of Monlam Gyatso, a monk from Raktam Village in Serthar County, Kardze Autonomous County, Sichuan, who was born in 1976 and was reportedly sentenced to two or three years in prison in the fall (differing reports in *RFA* and *Tibet Watch*, the exact timing of the trial is also unknown). As *RFA* explained, because of tightened communication controls in Tibet, it is very difficult to verify information on cases like Monlam Gyatso's (*rfa.org* Dec. 19, 2022, Feb. 7, 2023; *tibet.net* Feb. 2, 2023; *tibetwatch.org* Dec. 16, 2022; March 3, 2023). *kwt*

February 11, 2023:

Taiwan denies Chinese delegation entry to Master Hsing Yun's funeral

See the entry for that date in the Taiwan section.

March 10, 2023:

Master Chuanyin, former chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association, passes away

Buddhist Dharma master Chuanyin 传印 died at the Donglin Temple in Lushan, Jiangxi Province, at the age of 96. He was born in Liaoning in 1927 and grew up in a Buddhist family. He entered Zhenru Monastery in Yongxiu County, Jiangxi, and was ordained there in 1955 by the well-known Chan master Xuyun. During the Cultural Revolution he had to grow vegetables. From 1979 to 1981 he worked in the research department of the Chinese Buddhist Association, from 1981 to 1983 he stayed in Japan for studies. From 1984 to 1991 and then again from 1995 to 2015 he worked at the Chinese Buddhist Academy, among other things as director of studies and vice rector, but in between he also held positions in various monasteries. From 2010 to 2015, Chuanyin was the chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association. An obituary by the *Xinhua* News Agency called him a “patriotic religious figure and a friend of the CCP.” But there also seems to have been another side: In February 2010, the Hong Kong newspaper *Ming Pao* reported that in 1989, against the will of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, Master Chuanyin and Master Jinghui (1933–2013) led more than 120 monks to the Tian'anmen square to support the students who were on hunger strike (biographical data: *Fenghuang fojiao* April 16, 2015, *Xinhua* March 21, 2023 according to chinabuddhism.com.cn; *Ming Pao* website Feb. 1, 2010 according to *BBC Monitoring*). *kwt*

Christianity

March 19-26, 2023:

Secretary General of United Bible Societies (UBS) visits Protestant and Catholic governing bodies in China

According to *China Christian Daily*, the Rev. Dirk Gevers, Secretary General of UBS since November 2022, was invited by the national “Two Bodies” of the Protestant Churches of China, China Christian Council and Three-Self Movement. Rev. Gevers was accompanied on his visit to China by Bernard Low and Daniel Loh, the two co-directors of the UBS China Partnership, and its adviser Kua Wee Seng. At a meeting with the delegation on March 20, Xu Xiaohong, chairman of the Three-Self Movement, described the mutual respect-based cooperation between the “Two Bodies” and UBS as exemplary. Rev. Wu Wei, Chairman of the Christian Council, presented the history of Christianity in China and the Sinicization process of recent years. According to the report in *China Christian Daily* and on the website of the “Two Bodies,” Rev. Gevers declared that the Bible belongs to all mankind rather than to a specific language or culture.

On March 23, Bishop Shen Bin, Chairman of the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference, met the UBS delegation and thanked them for the UBS' support by donating Bible printing paper and in Bible printing; he expressed the desire to strengthen cooperation with UBS. Shen Bin also spoke about the Sini-

cization process. On March 23, the guests also met the new director of the National Religious Affairs Administration, Chen Ruifeng (chinachristiandaily.com March 28, 2023; en.ccctspm.org March 23, 2023; sara.gov.cn March 25, 2023; xinde.org March 29, 2023).

The Amity Printing Company of Nanjing, the only government-licensed printer to print Bibles for distribution within China, was established in 1986 as a joint venture between the Amity Foundation and UBS. At an online seminar of the UBS China Partnership with the governing bodies of the Chinese Catholic Church in June 2021, cooperation on a new Chinese Catholic Bible translation was also discussed (cf. *RCTC* 2021, No. 4, pp. 13-14). As part of the religious policy agenda of Sinicization, the Christian churches in China are called upon to revise their Bible translations. *kwt*

Protestant Churches

November 28-30, 2022:

Celebrations mark the 70th anniversary of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary

From November 28-30, 2022, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary's 70th anniversary celebrations in Nanjing were held online and in person, with thanksgiving services, academic seminars, alumni forums and cultural performances. The alumni offered various ways to congratulate the college on its 70th anniversary, and letters of congratulations were received from church institutions across China and the world. Since its founding in 1952, the seminary has trained more than 3,000 graduates, developed five postgraduate programs and a Masters of Ministry, held a variety of Bible and correspondence courses, trained numerous leaders for the Chinese church, and made important contributions to the Chinese church and society. As the highest-ranking seminary of the Protestant Church in China, the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary is also the oldest and largest religious Protestant institution in the country. It is an important basis for the qualification of young Christians and personnel in all areas. The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary was founded by the national umbrella organization of Protestant Christians in China as a merger of various theological seminaries. The founding of the seminary was an important step in the development of the Protestant Church in China as it helped fill the shortage of trained leaders in the church. Graduates work in various areas of the church, such as pastoring, research and teaching.

Liu Ruomin, Nordkirche weltweit

January 18, 2023:

Author Liao Yiwu in Stuttgart

The Chinese dissident and writer Liao Yiwu, born in 1958, held the City of Stuttgart's 2nd "speech on the future" in front of 550 guests on January 18. He accused the People's Republic of China of waging an invisible war through authoritarian control, disinformation and abuse of power. He was imprisoned for four years for his poem "Massacre," which deals with the events on Tian'anmen Square on June 4, 1989. In 2011 he managed to escape abroad. Since then he has lived in Berlin. Finally, Liao Yiwu was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2012 for his book *Gott ist rot: Geschichten aus dem Untergrund – Verfolgte Christen in China* (God is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China). In the book, the author portrays believers in Yunnan Province or their relatives, who suffered severe persecution because of their Christian beliefs, especially at the time of the Cultural Revolution. Among his close friends is Pastor Wang Yi, leader of the Early

Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, who is currently serving a nine-year sentence on charges of “incitement against the state.” Organizations such as Bitter Winter repeatedly report repressions against followers of the house church in Chengdu, which continues to gather at different locations despite the ban. Liao Yiwu protests in public and in the press against the government’s treatment of Pastor Wang Yi and his church and accuses China of persecuting Christians. Following his speech in Stuttgart, there was a panel discussion with Volker Stanzel, the former German ambassador in Beijing in the years 2004–2007. On January 19, Church Councilor Dr. Christine Keim, Pastor Monika Renninger and Pastor Christoph Hildebrandt-Ayasse invited an audience interested in the church to a discussion with Liao Yiwu in the Hospitalhof in Stuttgart, which was supposed to deal with religious politics and the situation of Christianity in China. The author is not himself a Christian and, as it turned out, had never been to a church of the Chinese Christian Council. He answered all questions with reference to the research for his book on the individual fates of persecuted Christians in Yunnan. In 2023, Klett-Cotta Verlag published Liao Yiwu’s book *Unsichtbare Kriegführung. Wie ein Buch ein Imperium bezwingt*.

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

February 2023:

Repression of house church groups and individuals

Meetings of members of some house churches proscribed by the Chinese government in recent years are being banned in different parts of the country. For example, on February 8, police forces dispersed a gathering of members of the Beijing Shouwang House Church and took Pastor Zhang Xiaofeng into custody. Since March 2019, the congregation, which was given a certain priority in the sense of a coordination and information center within the house church movement, has been formally liquidated. According to reports, in addition to the breaking up of illegal services, confiscation of materials and short-term arrests, there is also harassment and intimidation in the private sphere. Xiao Lubiao, working at the Early Rainbow Covenant Church in Chengdu, complained that his home was blocked by police officers and the front lock was destroyed on February 26 and 27. A member of the same church reported punctured car tires in early March, another reported the interruption of the water and electricity supply to her home (bitterwinter.org Feb. 4; March 03, 2023).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

December 19, 2022:

Kaifeng Underground bishop passes away

Bishop Joseph Gao Hongxiao, a member of the Order of Friar Minors and underground bishop of the Diocese of Kaifeng in Henan Province, died at his home in Meixian, Shaanxi province, at the age of 77. Bishop Gao was secretly ordained on January 1, 2005 with a mandate from the Holy See as coadjutor to Bishop John Baptist Liang Xisheng, who died two years later, but was never recognized by the Chinese authorities. The “official” seat of Kaifeng has been vacant since the death of illegitimate Bishop Stanislaus Han Daoyi in 2001. Bishop Han was ordained bishop in 1993 without papal approval. The number of Catholics in Kaifeng is estimated at around 30,000. In addition to Kaifeng, the bishoprics in Zhengzhou, Shangqiu, Luoyang and Zhumadian are also vacant in Henan (*AsiaNews* Dec. 20, 2022). *kf*

January 1, 2023:

Tangshan Diocese inaugurates “Year of Spirituality” to overcome pandemic crisis in the faith life

Bishop Fang Jianping opened the “Year of Spirituality” in a festive service in the Tangshan Cathedral in Hebei Province. He wrote in his pastoral letter for this special year that the year is about Christ as the “way” to a spiritual life. The Diocesan Center for Pastoral Care and Evangelization prepared a pastoral plan for the Year of Spirituality. According to a report on the Catholic portal *Xinde (Faith)*, the three years of the pandemic have caused a crisis in the religious life of Catholics because activities in the parishes have largely come to a standstill; on the other hand, the pandemic period also offered an opportunity for reflection on the faith. Through spiritual exercises as a group and individually, the believers should overcome difficulties together, reawaken their zeal for the faith and find a spiritual home. As the report in *Xinde* shows, the Tangshan Diocese has had a special motto for each of the last few years: 2019 was the Year of the Family, 2020 the Year of Faith, 2021 the Year of Love and 2022 the Year of the Church. In 2022, the focus was on maintaining the connection between pastors and believers in the face of the pandemic-related church closures (*xinde.org* Jan. 02, 2023). *kwt*

January 2, 2023:

Bishop Huo Cheng of Fenyang, Shanxi Province, dies at the age of 96

Bishop John Huo was the oldest living bishop in China. For more information about him, see the obituary in the Information section of *China heute* 2023, No. 1, pp. 14-15 (in German).

January 5, 2023:

Reactions to the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in the Chinese Church

In mainland China, the former Pope who died on December 31, 2022 was commemorated in many places. The Catholic portal *Xinde* reported on a series of commemorative Masses in Shaanxi province with many photos. For example, on January 5, Bishop Dang Mingyan celebrated a memorial Mass in Xi'an Cathedral along with seven priests. On the day of Pope Benedict's funeral on January 5, which was also the second anniversary of the death of Bishop Joseph Zong Huaide of Sanyuan, the incumbent Bishop Han Yingjin, together with 38 priests and more than 70 religious sisters and faithful of the diocese, in the church of Tongyuan (the former seat of Bishop Zong) celebrated a Mass for the two deceased. – The official bodies, the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Patriotic Association, put on their website a short text about the death of Pope Benedict with a request for the prayers of the faithful. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning expressed condolences from the “Chinese side” on January 6. The chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the chairman of the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference sent Pope Francis a telegram of condolences on behalf of the more than 6 million clergy and faithful of the Chinese Catholic Church (*xinde.org* Jan. 5, 2023, June 6, 2023; www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/23010001-1.htm; www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202301/t20230106_11003073.shtml). *kf*

January 31, 2023:

Bishop Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou (Zhejiang) abducted once again by the authorities

According to a report by *AsiaNews* of January 31, 2023, Bishop Shao was once again taken to an undisclosed location by officials together with his diocesan secretary and chancellor, Father Jiang Sunian, this time to prevent them from attending the funeral of the 90-year-old underground priest Chen Nai-liang from Pingyang. Bishop Shao has been arrested and kidnapped several times in the past and had to attend study sessions to persuade him to convert to the official Church. Bishop Shao is recognized by the Pope but not by the Chinese authorities. Most recently, the bishop was arrested shortly before Easter on April 7, 2022, and before that on October 25, 2021 (*AsiaNews* Jan. 31, 2023; cf. *RCTC* 2022, No. 1, p. 11; 2022, No. 3, p. 13). *kf*

February 6, 2023:

A religious Sister has died in Wuxi at the age of 104

Sister Jiang from Wuxi, Diocese of Nanjing, was probably the oldest surviving religious sister in China. Born on December 28, 1918 into a family that had been Catholic for generations, she joined the Daughters of Charity, originally from France, in the 1940s and took her first vows in 1945. During the Cultural Revolution, she was forced to work in a factory and was only able to return to work in Wuxi in the 1980s at the age of 64. In an interview recorded by *UCAN* in Hong Kong a few years ago, Sister Jiang reported on these difficult times: "Life was worthless in those days." She was urged to get married, but she refused. Her strength in those years came from prayer: "I did not recite the prayers in front of others, but deep in my heart, without texts but from memory. I asked God's help not to be tempted to fall and to have the possibility of returning to my congregation. I never lost hope because I had faith in God." After her return she was able to work in the parish again: "Every summer we organized catechism and Bible study courses for children, with about 200 participants." In the Holy Year 2000 she was given special permission to travel to the mother house in France and on this occasion could also visit Rome, where she personally met Pope John Paul II. However, she initially kept the photograph with the Pope hidden after her return for fear of the authorities. In 2016, looking back on her ministry, she said: "I cannot make any difference to the world at this age but I believe that God has his own plan for the Catholic Church in China" (*AsiaNews* Feb. 2, 2023). *kf*

February 13, 2023:

Bishop Cui Tai: After 16 years of arrests and releases, believers call for an end to his illegal detention

According to a report by *AsiaNews*, nothing has been heard since spring 2021 of the whereabouts of Bishop Augustine Cui Tai of the Diocese of Xuanhua/Zhangjiakou (Hebei Province). Some events of the 2022 Winter Olympics were held in Zhangjiakou. Since 2007, i.e., for a total of about 16 years, the 71-year-old bishop has been illegally detained by the authorities without any grounds or legal procedure. Bishop Cui is recognized by the Holy See but not by the Chinese government. In recent years, the authorities have granted the bishop brief visits to his elderly relatives for the Spring Festival or Mid-Autumn Festival. However, since the last time the priest was taken away in spring 2021, he has not

returned home and the faithful have had no way of knowing anything about his well-being or whereabouts (*AsiaNews* Feb. 13, 2023). *kf*

February 22, 2023:

Datong Diocese: Authorities use pickaxes to demolish the house of priests and sisters

On February 22, in Datong, Shanxi province, police began demolishing a diocesan building previously used as a priests' and sisters' residence, *AsiaNews* learned from local sources who circulated videos of the incident online. The building and the adjacent church have all the necessary permits, it says, but are in an area of high urban property values. According to *AsiaNews*, Datong believers sent messages on WeChat asking for prayers to stop the mayor's "unreasonable behavior." The official diocese of Datong has not had a bishop since 2005 (*AsiaNews* March 23, 2023). *kf*

March 20, 2023:

Zhuo Xinping names "five pioneering personalities" for the Sinicization of Catholicism

Zhuo Xinping, former director of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and an expert for Christian studies, gave a lecture to students, lecturers and guests at the Shaanxi Catholic Theological Seminary in Xi'an on the topic "Historical Development of Sinicized Catholic Thought." He named "five pioneering personalities" (领军人物) for the Sinicization of Chinese Catholicism: Xu Guangqi 徐光启, Ma Xiangbo 马相伯, Xu Zongze 徐宗泽, Wu Jingxiong 吴经熊 and Zhang Chunshen 张春申. What these five well-known men of the Church have in common is that they used elements of traditional Chinese culture to explain the Christian faith, Zhuo said (*xinde.org* March 23, 2023).

The short report does not show how Zhuo justified his interesting selection in detail. Xu Guangqi (1562–1633) was one of the most important converts, a statesman and friend of the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci. Ma Xiangbo (1840–1939), originally a Jesuit, was involved in education and founded several colleges. The Jesuit Xu Zongze (1886–1947), a descendant of Xu Guangqi, published the journal *Revue Catholique* during the Republic era, for which he wrote numerous articles himself, and wrote fundamental works on Chinese Church history. Wu Jingxiong (1899–1986) was a lawyer and diplomat, from 1947 to 1949 he served as Ambassador of the Republic of China to the Holy See. His Christian writings include a translation of the New Testament and the Psalms into classical Chinese. The Jesuit Zhang Chunshen (1929–2015) is considered a pioneer of a Chinese-inculturated theology that he developed in Taiwan. *kwt*

Sino-Vatican Relations

January 22, 2023:

Pope Francis extends Chinese New Year greetings

At the end of the Sunday Angelus, Pope Francis greeted the people on the occasion of the Far East Lunar New Year on January 22 with the following words: "Today I would like to express my wish for peace

and every good to all those in the Far East, and in various parts of the world, who are celebrating the Lunar New Year. Nevertheless, on this joyous occasion, I cannot fail to mention my spiritual nearness to those who are going through difficult times due to the coronavirus pandemic, with the hope that these present difficulties may soon be overcome. Lastly, I hope that the kindness, sensitivity, solidarity and harmony that are being experienced in these days as families traditionally reunite, may always permeate and characterize family and social relationships, so as to live a serene and happy life. Happy New Year!” (www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/angelus/2023/documents/20230122-angelus.html). *kf*

March 13, 2023:

Cardinal Parolin comments on dialogue with China

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, responded to questions from journalists and recalled the importance of the provisional Sino-Vatican Agreement on the appointment of bishops, *Vatican News* reports. He spoke of an “attitude of hope” and a dialogue that “both sides want to continue.” “We only ask that Catholics can be Catholics with a link to the Universal Church,” the cardinal said. He also said that the planned visit of Bishop Stephen Chow, SJ, of Hong Kong to the diocese of Beijing in late April this year is a “positive gesture” (*Vatican News* March 14, 2023). *kwt*

March 14, 2012:

Interview with Vatican “Foreign Minister”: Agreement with China “not the best deal possible”

Catholic News Agency (CNA) reported on March 14 the interview that Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Vatican Secretary for Relations with States, gave to *EWTN News*. According to *CNA*, the archbishop said that diplomats of the Holy See would negotiate improvements to the deal with China. “Obviously, the objective is to get the best deal possible, which certainly this agreement is not the best deal possible because of the other party: They were only prepared to go so far and to agree to certain things. But that was what was possible at the time,” Gallagher said, adding: “It wasn’t really a great time to sign the deal, for various reasons. It was always going to be difficult; it was always going to be used by the Chinese party to bring greater pressure on the Catholic community, particularly on the so-called underground Church. So we just go forward.” Gallagher said he believes that over the years the Vatican and the Chinese authorities have gained greater understanding and respect for each other. In the interview with *EWTN* reported by *CNA*, he also confirmed that “there are negotiations underway for the appointment of other bishops” (www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253860/vatican-china-deal-not-the-best-deal-possible-top-holy-see-diplomat-says ; the whole interview can be followed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHNVQkXIJVk). *kwt*

Hong Kong

January 5, 2023:

Surprisingly, Cardinal Zen attends the funeral of the late Pope emeritus Benedict XVI and is received in a private audience with Pope Francis

After the death of Benedict XVI, it was completely unexpected that Cardinal Zen would travel to Rome for his funeral on January 5. Shortly before, he had received special permission from a Hong Kong

court and was given back his passport for five days, which had been confiscated by the police when he was arrested in May of 2022. Pope Benedict appointed Joseph Zen a cardinal in 2006; the Cardinal had always had a close relationship with Pope Benedict. After the funeral ceremonies, Pope Francis received him in the Santa Marta guest house and his private rooms. The content of their conversation remained confidential, but the cardinal said he thanked the Pope for giving Hong Kong a “good bishop,” Stephen Chow SJ, and recounted his pastoral ministry in Hong Kong prisons, about which the pope said he was “very happy.” – At the end of January, the cardinal had to be treated in hospital for respiratory and other ailments. – Cardinal Zen was fined HK\$ 4,000 on November 25 last year, along with five pro-democracy activists, for improperly registering the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund. He countered on December 12 by appealing his conviction to the Hong Kong Supreme Court (*America Magazine* Jan. 6, 2023; *AsiaNews* Jan. 7; Febr. 1, 2023; *Hong Kong Free Press* Dec. 14, 2022; *Licas* Jan. 4, 2023; *UCAN* Jan. 10, 2023). *kf*

March 9, 2023:

Announcement: Bishop Chow of Hong Kong will travel to China with a delegation in April

The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong announced in a press release on March 9 that Bishop Stephen Chow, SJ, will travel to China on April 17: “At the invitation of Bishop Joseph Li Shan of the Diocese of Beijing, Bishop Stephen Chow, SJ, of the Diocese of Hong Kong, along with Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha, OFM and vicar general Father Peter Choy, will travel to the Diocese of Beijing for a five-day visit from 17th April. According to Bishop Chow, this visit underscores the mission of the Diocese of Hong Kong to be a bridge Church and promote exchanges and interactions between the two sides. The invitation was received sometime last year from the Diocese of Beijing and accepted in the spirit of brotherhood in the Lord toward the end of last year. In addition to the three priests, the delegation will include the bishop’s personal assistant, Wong Ka-chun. The bishop requests his brothers, sisters and friends in Christ to pray for the success of the visit.” – In a press briefing on March 13, Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin described the planned visit as “the realization of that typical dimension of the Church of Hong Kong that should be a ‘bridge church’ between mainland China and the Universal Church” and described it therefore as “a positive gesture” (*Vatican News* March 14, 2023; <https://catholic.org.hk/en/media-09032023/>). *kf*

Macau

February 25 to March 17, 2023:

Macau: “The Journey over a Thousand Miles” Major Inter-Religious Exhibition

According to a report by *O Clarim*, the journal of the Macau Catholic Seminary, dated February 28, 2023, the Old Courthouse on Avenida da Praia Grande would host (until March 17) the largest inter-religious event organized in Macau since the handover of power (1999). The exhibition “The Journey over a Thousand Miles,” according to the report, focuses on the cultural and religious heritage of the six religions that have the largest number of followers in Macau, and brings together 109 artifacts and sacred objects from Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam, the Baha’i Faith and the Anglican Church. The joint work is the result of a long process of dialogue and deliberation that has lasted for more than a year, thus the report. Benedict Keith Ip is curating the exhibition (*O Clarim* Feb. 28, 2023). *kf*

Taiwan

January 13, 2023:

After the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: Taiwan's head of state, Tsai Ing-wen, offers her condolences at the Apostolic Nunciature

The President of Taiwan visited the Apostolic Nunciature in Taipei to offer her condolences to the Holy See on the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on December 31, 2022. In her dedication (in Chinese) she expressed her sincere condolences, writing, “May the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, whose humanity has a constant place in all our hearts, rest in eternal peace; and may the longstanding friendship between Taiwan and the Vatican remain firm and enduring.” The president was accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu, among others, and met the Chargé d'affaires, Monsignor Stefano Mazzotti, in the Apostolic Nunciature (*AsiaNews* Jan. 14, 2023; www.president.gov.tw/News/2724601/13/2023). *kf*

January 23, 2023:

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen writes to Pope Francis

A war between Taiwan and China is not an option and it is more important to develop cross-strait relations, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said in a letter to Pope Francis. According to *UCAN*, she sent the letter in response to Pope Francis' message on the 56th World Day of Peace on January 1, emphasizing bilateral dialogue to bring peace and stability to the region. Tsai declared that “armed confrontation is absolutely not an option” and underscored Taiwan's determination to end the conflict with China through peaceful means. “Only by respecting the commitment of the Taiwanese people to our sovereignty, democracy, and freedom, can there be a foundation for resuming constructive interaction across the Taiwan Strait,” Tsai wrote. Referring to Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, the president highlighted Taiwan's resolve to “partner with like-minded nations to support reconstruction efforts in Ukraine.” As of March 2022, Taiwan had donated more than US-\$30 million in funds and distributed around 650 tons of supplies to support the millions of Ukrainian war refugees, according to *UCAN*. Tsai also pointed to the fact that Taiwan remains barred from the World Health Organization (WHO). – The year 2022 marked the 80th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Taiwan and the Holy See. The Vatican is the only country in Europe that maintains full diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Catholics in Taiwan make up about one percent of Taiwan's population of more than 23 million (*UCAN* Jan. 24, 2023). *kf*

January 26, 2023:

Catholic Professor Chen Chien-jen becomes Taiwan's new prime minister

In the course of a government reshuffle, President Tsai Ing-wen appointed her former vice president (2016 to 2020) as the new prime minister. Philip Chen, a 71-year-old professed Catholic, is an experienced politician and renowned epidemiologist. In August 2021, Pope Francis appointed him a member of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences. He is the second Taiwanese to become a member of the academy, after Lee Yuan-tseh, a Nobel laureate in chemistry. On January 5, Chen attended the funeral

of Pope Benedict XVI as Tsai's special envoy to the Vatican. – Chen's appointment comes at a time when the ruling Democratic Progressive Party is seeking a cabinet reshuffle after suffering heavy losses in recent local elections, according to *UCAN*. Chen joined the DPP last year after having previously been an independent. Presidential and parliamentary elections are due in Taiwan in 2024. The current president, Tsai Ing-wen, cannot run for again after her two terms in office (*AsiaNews* Jan. 23, 2023; *NZZ* Jan. 27, 2023; *T@iwan heute* Jan. 31, 2023; *UCAN* Jan. 27, 2023). *kf*

February 5, 2023:

Dharma-Master Hsing Yun, founder of Fo Guang Shan, dies at the age of 95

Hsing Yun (星雲, pinyin: Xingyun) was born in 1927 in Jiangsu Province in Mainland China. While still on the Mainland, he took his vows as a Buddhist monk. After the communists won the civil war in 1949, he came to Taiwan. In 1967 he founded the Fo Guang Shan 佛光山 monastery in Kaohsiung with the aim of promoting the principles of “humanistic Buddhism” and peace, according to the *Taipei Times*. Over the years, Fo Guang Shan has expanded, engaging in education, charity and media. It has established 300 temples worldwide, as well as seminaries, libraries and publishing houses, and five universities. In recent decades, Hsing Yun has become increasingly involved in exchanges with Mainland China, promoting the construction of monasteries and libraries there. According to an editorial in the *Taipei Times*, however, he was regularly criticized in Taiwan for his support for peaceful reunification with China.

An obituary by Zhang Guanglai on the portal of the Shijiazhuang Catholic newspaper *Xinde* (*Faith*) recognized Hsing Yun's contribution to interreligious dialogue with the Catholic Church (*xinde.org* Feb. 8, 2023; *Taipei Times* Feb. 7, 2023, p. 2; Feb. 14, p. 8). A full obituary will appear in the next issue of *China heute*. *kwt*

February 11, 2023:

Taiwan denies Chinese delegation entry to Master Hsing Yun's funeral

A 38-strong Chinese “condolence delegation” led by Long Mingbiao, deputy head of the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) of China's State Council, and Ye Xiaowen, director of the National Religious Affairs Administration from 1995 to 2009, on February 11 already gathered at the airport in Beijing, but could not take off because Taiwan refused them entry. A TAO spokeswoman said the same day that by refusing entry to the condolence delegation formed at the invitation of the Fo Guang Shan, the DPP [Taiwan's ruling party] “disregarded basic humanitarian principles [...]. As a result, the funeral of Hsing Yun cannot be held properly, a serious offense to the believers at Fo Guang Shan Monastery.”

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) justified the refusal of entry in several statements by saying that the delegation contained twelve serving officials of the TAO and the United Front Department of the Chinese Communist Party, whose travel requests should have gone through the agreed liaison mechanism between TAO and MAC, something which did not happen. Given that Ye Xiaowen's last visit to Taiwan in 2009 had sparked public protests, his current entry application was denied “on account of social stability and security issues,” to “avoid unnecessary disruption to the Taiwan society and ensure the smooth completion of the memorial ceremony for Master Hsing Yun,” a MAC statement said. Taiwan had been willing to accept other delegation members' entry, but Beijing had insisted that the delegation should “enter and exit as a group,” thus the MAC. “We hope that, at this moment,

Mainland China can join Taiwan in remembering Master Hsing Yun and his legacy and refrain from deepening the resentment of the Taiwan public through further political manipulation,” the MAC’s February 10 statement said. The MAC stressed that Taiwan would welcome Chinese mourners and had issued entry permits to 124 individuals from the Mainland and Hong Kong for the occasion.

The dismissed condolence delegation held its own memorial service at Dajue Temple in Yixing, Jiangsu Province, on February 12 as a substitute. Abbot Hsin Bao of Fo Guang Shan was connected via video from Taiwan. He said that in accordance with Hsing Yun’s wishes, the disciples of Fo Guang Shan would continue to work to promote Buddhist exchanges and the peaceful development of cross-strait relations (chinabuddhism.com.cn Feb. 10, 11, 14, 2023; chinadaily.com.cn Feb. 11, 2023; taipeitimes.com Feb. 12, 2023; TAO statement of Feb. 11, 2023 according to chinanews.com.cn Feb. 11, 2023; MAC press statements of Feb. 10, 2023, Feb. 11 and Feb. 13, 2023 at mac.gov.tw). *kwt*

February 18, 2023:

Former president of Fu Jen University passed away

Monsignor Ly Chen-ying, the former president of Taipei’s Fu Jen Catholic University, died on February 18 at the age of 93 at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Chiayi, where he had been living for the past 10 years due to his precarious health, according to *AsiaNews*. Ly served as president of the university from 1992 to 1996 and was the last priest president. Ly, a well-known philosopher and theologian in Taiwan, was originally from Tianjin, where he was born on October 14, 1929. In 1955 he was ordained a priest in Italy. He worked as a philosophy professor at various Taiwanese universities and for a few years as Secretary General of the Chinese Regional Bishops’ Conference. He worked on West-East cultural and philosophical comparison and the Chinese Church in Mainland China. Numerous book publications come from his pen. Until recently, Ly Chen-ying was a member emeritus of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas. His funeral was celebrated on February 25 by the Bishop of Chiayi, Norbert Pu Ying-hsiung (*AsiaNews* Feb. 21, 2023; www.past.va/content/past/en/academicians/emeritus/ly_chen_ying.html). *kf*

Authors’ Abbreviations:

Katharina Feith (*kf*)

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber (*kwt*)

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