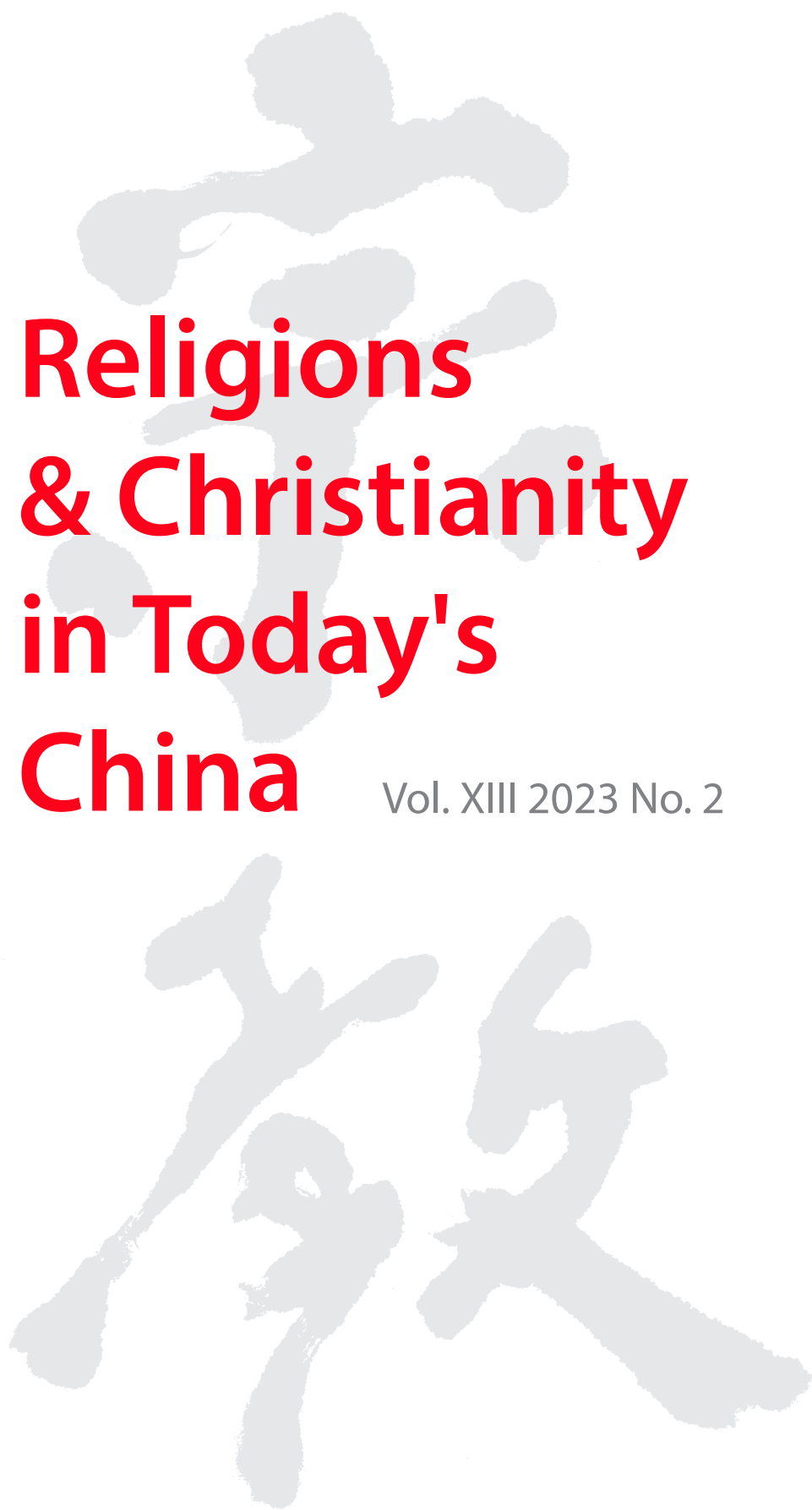


**Religions  
& Christianity  
in Today's  
China**

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中國宗教評論



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## Statistics on Religions and Churches in the People's Republic of China – Update for the Year 2022

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

Translated by Sr. Jacqueline Mulberge SSpS

In our annual statistical updates, we usually bring figures of China's five major state-recognized religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism. This year, however, we first focus on traditional folk beliefs which are not officially counted as religion but are now partly tolerated and sometimes even encouraged by the authorities. With new data from the China Family Panel Studies, Chinese researchers endeavored to find the proportion of folk religion adherents in the population. They also wanted to know which combinations of beliefs are particularly frequent in this syncretic system. For Buddhism, there are findings from a survey of Buddhist students on the compatibility of faith and "real" life, for Islam there are figures on "Muslim cultural heritage." Since new data are not available for each religion every year, we fall back partly on figures from previous years to complete the picture. The figures given in the following text refer to the religions in Mainland China.

### 1. News from the China Family Panel Studies: How Widely Distributed is Traditional Folk Religion in China?

According to many anthropologists, traditional folk religion is widespread among the Chinese population, but in surveys on religion it is either not taken into account at all or only achieves vanishingly small percentages. According to Chinese researchers Zhang Chunni, Lu Yunfeng and Sheng He, this is due to the methods applied to measure Chinese religion.<sup>1</sup> Using new data from the 2018 survey of the China Family Panel Studies (*Zhongguo jiating zhuiyong diaocha* 中国家庭追踪调查, CFPS for short), they tried to get to the bottom of the phenomenon. The researchers wanted to know not only how widespread folk religion is among the people, but also how the different beliefs are combined in the religious life of the Chinese. They further asked how different types of folk religion adherents differ in terms of commitment.<sup>2</sup> According to their research, 70% of all Chinese are followers of folk religion, almost 50% adhere to two or more religious beliefs and only

1 Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, pp. 576-578. – Zhang Chunni and Lu Yunfeng belong to the Department of Sociology of Peking University, the affiliation of Sheng He could not be established.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 576.

25.2% have no religious belief at all.<sup>3</sup> The methods of analysis they used to arrive at these figures and further results of their study will be presented below.

**“Denomination-based” scheme versus “deity-based” scheme and the renewed question module on religion of CFPS 2018.** The China Family Panel Studies, which have already been discussed several times in the *RCTC* annual statistics, have become a preferred data base for ever new questions, also in the field of sociology of religion. It is an annual longitudinal survey funded by the Chinese government through Peking University.<sup>4</sup> Since 2012, the study participants have also been surveyed on the topic of religion every two years. The study designers experiment with different questions in order to capture the phenomenon of religiosity in the Chinese context as well as possible. The 2012 and 2016 CFPS surveys (CFPS 2012 and CFPS 2016 for short) used a “denomination-based” scheme: “Which religion do you belong to?” CFPS 2014 applied a “deity-based” scheme: “What do you believe in?” When this “deity-based” form of question was used, the proportion of those who stated a religious belief increased.<sup>5</sup>

In CFPS 2018, the question scheme was again deity-based. Unlike CFPS 2014, where the question was asked in the “check-all-that-apply” format (i.e. respondents are asked to mark all responses that apply from a list of options), CFPS 2018 used the “forced-choice” format, where a choice between yes and no must be made for each item of religious belief. According to the authors, the latter format leads to a deeper engagement with the question and thus to more accurate results.<sup>6</sup> The first question in the CFPS 2018 religion module was “Do you believe in Buddha or Bodhisattvas?” (*Nin shifou xiangxin fo huo pusa?* 您是否相信佛或菩薩?) Possible answer “Yes” (*shi* 是) or “No” (*fou* 否). In the same “Do you believe in ...” form, respondents were asked in separate questions if they believed in [Daoist] deities and immortals (*shenxian* 神仙), in the true God Allah (*zhenzhu anla* 真主安拉), in God (*tianzhu* 天主 [Catholic name of God]), in Jesus Christ (Yesu Jidu 耶穌基督), in ancestors (*zuxian* 祖先), in ghosts (*gui* 鬼) and in geomancy (*fengshui* 風水).<sup>7</sup> The question “Do you believe in Jesus Christ?” was designed to measure Protestant religious adherents; this was a change from CFPS 2014, where belief in the “Protestant God” (*jidujiao de shangdi* 基督教的上帝) had been offered as an option to measure Protestant

3 Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, pp. 582-583. – The percentage 25.2% for the proportion of those who stated no religious belief is found in the text on p. 582 and in Table 1 on p. 583, whereas Chart 1 on p. 582 states the percentage as 25.1%. Obviously, rounding up was different in both cases. In this “Statistical Update” we use a uniform 25.2%.

4 Since 2010, the Institute of Social Science Survey of Peking University has periodically surveyed a fixed panel of families and individuals in 25 of China’s 31 provinces, direct-controlled municipalities and autonomous regions, i.e. all except Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia and Hainan, on topics such as economic activities, education, family situation, migration, health, etc. The survey does not include Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. The survey has a target sample size of 16,000 households. See the project website [www.iss.pku.edu.cn/cfps/index.htm](http://www.iss.pku.edu.cn/cfps/index.htm) (Chinese and English versions, last accessed on March 22, 2023). For the religion-related findings of the survey already discussed in *RCTC*, see Wenzel-Teuber 2015, pp. 21-28; the same 2017, pp. 26-28; the same 2020, pp. 21-30; the same 2021, pp. 20-24.

5 See Zhang – Lu 2020; cf. also Wenzel-Teuber 2017, pp. 26-27.

6 Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, p. 580.

7 These questions can be found in the overall CFPS 2018 questionnaire (中国家庭追踪调查2018年汇总问卷) on p. 158, available online at [www.iss.pku.edu.cn/cfps/docs/2020122114508915650.pdf?CSRFT=GOWZ-LAIL-VP83-W5EQ-D6Y3-2VRA-G6AV-VOUL](http://www.iss.pku.edu.cn/cfps/docs/2020122114508915650.pdf?CSRFT=GOWZ-LAIL-VP83-W5EQ-D6Y3-2VRA-G6AV-VOUL) (accessed on March 9, 2023).

believers. The first 5 questions were intended to detect followers of the 5 major religions. For identifying followers of folk religion, CFPS 2014 had already included the category of ancestors, CFPS 2018 additionally added belief in ghosts and belief in geomancy.<sup>8</sup>

To anticipate: The change to the “forced-choice” question format in CFPS 2018 apparently encouraged a significant proportion of respondents to answer “Yes” to more than one belief question. This led – as researcher Min Li (Institute of Daoism and Religious Culture, Sichuan University) noted in another paper – to the result that in CFPS 2018 the number of identified faith adherents was far higher than the number of respondents!<sup>9</sup>

**How widespread is folk religion among the Chinese population?** To explain the method they use to trace the spread of folk religion, Zhang, Lu and Sheng first point out some of the characteristics of Chinese folk religion. According to the authors, it is characterized by diffuseness. They are referring to the terminology used by C.K. Yang in his influential book *Religion in Chinese Society. A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley – Los Angeles 1961). Yang distinguishes between diffused religion and institutional religion in China. The term “diffused” means that traditional Chinese religiosity does not exist independently, but is highly mixed with everyday life, without significant differentiation. According to the authors, Chinese folk religion is



In the streetscape of Macau, folk religion is even more visible than in Mainland China: combined mini-shrine for door, earth and wealth deity at the threshold of a residential building in Macau.

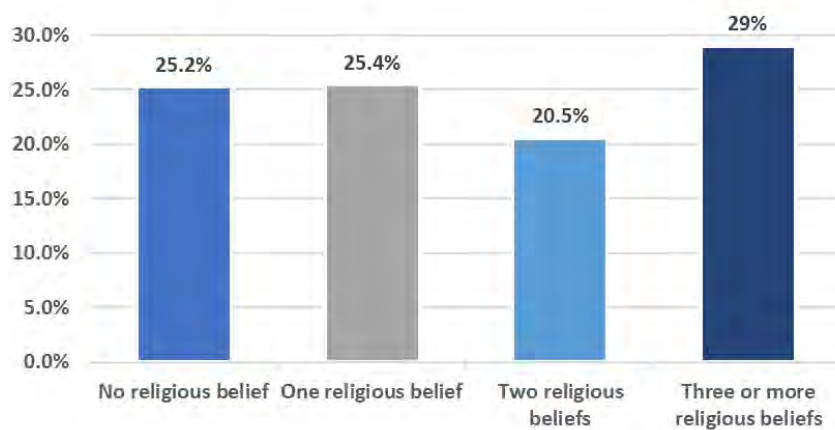
Photo: Katharina Feith, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, p. 580.

<sup>9</sup> Min 2022, p. 113. According to Min, the various beliefs had been stated 55,020 times by respondents, while the number of respondents was 37,356. (According to Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, only 29,996 people aged 16 and over answered the religion related questions in CFPS 2018. It is possible that Min Lin’s figure includes the survey participants under 16 who were not asked about religion). According to Min Lin, of those surveyed at CFPS 2018, 27.03% believed in Buddhism, 15.89% in Daoism, 3.12% in Islam, 4.71% in Protestantism, 3.42% in Catholicism, 46.89% in ancestors, 8.33% in ghosts and 37.9% in geomancy. *Ibid.*, p. 112, Table 5.

a syncretic system, a complex mixture of elements of Buddhism, Daoism and traditional beliefs such as gods, ghosts, ancestors and some supernatural forces.<sup>10</sup> The combination of several beliefs is, as it were, a characteristic of Chinese folk religion. However, according to the authors, so far “we do not quantitatively know how these elements combine with each other.” They point out that in previous surveys, including CFPS 2014, less than 1% of respondents had chosen more than one religious identity.<sup>11</sup>

**Graph 1: Total Number of Religious Beliefs Reported by Respondents, CFPS 2018**



Graph according to data in Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, pp. 582-583.

This has now changed with the modified questioning method described above: in CFPS 2018, 20.5% of respondents said they had two religious beliefs, and 29% even named three or more religious beliefs. “Undoubtedly, they are folk religion believers,” Zhang, Lu and Sheng conclude. Among the respondents who named only one belief, 14.5% believed in ancestors, 6.5% in geomancy and 0.3% in ghosts; the authors also classify them as practitioners of folk religion. In total, they arrive at a proportion of folk religion adherents of over 70% of the sample.<sup>12</sup>

Only 25.2% of the respondents in CFPS 2018 did not affirm any religious belief; in CFPS 2014, this was 62.3%. By contrast, the proportion of adherents of institutionalized religions (in which the authors apparently include those who had chosen only one faith, namely in one of the deities represented in the five major religions) was only 5% in CFPS 2018.<sup>13</sup> According to the authors, it is highly unlikely that this drastic decrease in religious non-believers from 62.3% in 2014 to around 25% in 2018 is due to the conversion of individuals surveyed. Rather, they see as the cause the additional options of belief in geomancy and in ghosts, which 46.9% and 10.3% of respondents affirmed respectively,

10 Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, pp. 578-579.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 579. They refer here also to their own 2020 study: in CFPS 2014 (deity-based questioning), only 0.8% of the sample had indicated more than one religious belief, and in CFPS 2016 (denomination-based questioning) only 0.1%; see Zhang – Lu 2020, pp. 421 and 422.

12 Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, pp. 581-582.

13 If we add the data for “single” [choice] for the corresponding deities from Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, p. 583, Table 1, we even get only 4.2%.

and the forced-choice question format, which apparently led many to state more than one belief.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1: Distribution of Responses for Each Religious Category, CFPS 2018 and 2014**

	Single choice or multiple choice	2018, Percentage of Respondents	2014, Percentage of Respondents
No Religion		25.2	62.3
Buddha/Bodhisattva	single choice	2.1	12.2
	multiple choice	31.3	2.3
Daoist Deities	single choice	0.4	0.8
	multiple choice	19.2	0.7
Allah	single choice	0.4	0.7
	multiple choice	3.4	0.0
Jesus Christ / Protestant God	single choice	1.2	2.0
	multiple choice	4.6	0.1
Catholic God	single choice	0.1	0.3
	multiple choice	4.1	0.1
Ancestors	single choice	14.5	4.4
	multiple choice	43.4	2.1
Ghosts	single choice	0.3	–
	multiple choice	10.0	–
Geomancy	single choice	6.5	–
	multiple choice	40.4	–

Table simplified according to Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, p. 583, Table 1.

“Single choice” here means the respondents only indicated one faith, “multiple choice” means they have indicated that faith in combination with other religious beliefs.

**How are different beliefs combined?** The authors wanted to find out in another step. For this, they used latent class analysis to develop a typology of four latent classes of religious believers, which are presented in the following:<sup>15</sup>

Class 1 is labelled by the authors as “non-believers and single-belief believers.” It includes the sub-group of those who did not indicate any belief, as well as those who stated exactly one belief, excluding those who only believe in geomancy. Class 1 makes up 46.1% of respondents, but half of them are non-believers.

Class 2 is labelled as “believers of geomancy.” This class consists mainly of those who only believe in geomancy and those who combined geomancy with other religious beliefs. Class 2 comprises 30.3% of those questioned. Within Class 2, the most common combinations are “geomancy + ancestors” (37.3%), “geomancy + ancestors + Buddha/Bodhisattva” (20.3%) and geomancy alone (19.9%).

Class 3 is labelled “believers of diffused Buddhism and Daoism.” The members of Class 3 tend to combine elements of folk religion with the institutionalized Chinese religions

14 Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, pp. 582-583 with Figure 2 and Table 1.

15 This method is explained in detail in Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, pp. 580f. The four latent classes of religious belief are described there, pp. 584-586.

(Daoism and Buddhism). 20.3% of those questioned belong to Class 3. The combination most occurring in Class 3 is “Daoism + Buddhism + ancestors + geomancy” (31.7%). 72.5% of those assigned to Class 3 believe in both Buddhism and Daoism.

Class 4 is labelled “believers embracing all beliefs.” Class 4 members show the highest degree of faith mixture with a high probability of adhering to all beliefs. Class 4 is the smallest of the identified types of religious adherents, accounting for 3.3% of the sample. In this category, belief in “Western” institutional, community-based religions (Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam) is combined with other beliefs, which the authors find particularly noteworthy.

**How strong is the religious commitment of folk religion adherents?** Earlier studies – according to Zhang, Lu and Sheng – often claimed that adherents of the folk religion were religiously less engaged than adherents of institutionalized religions, because they did not belong to a community and only visited the temple or religious specialists in times of crisis. The authors therefore wanted to find out how the different types of folk religion adherents they identified – Classes 2 to 4 presented above – differed in terms of their religious commitment. For this, they drew on the following data:

- Membership in a religious organization (this was asked about in CFPS 2018), and additionally
- Frequency of religious practice and the importance of religion in one’s life (asked in the CFPS surveys in 2012, 2014 and 2016).

It will not be explained here what the collected data and calculation methods look like in detail.<sup>16</sup> The authors come to the conclusion that among the adherents of folk religion, the practitioners of ancestor worship have the lowest religious commitment, followed by the believers of geomancy (Class 2) and the believers of diffused Buddhism and Daoism (Class 3). The highest commitment is shown by the members of Class 4, believers embracing all beliefs. The authors conclude that the higher the degree of faith mixture, the higher the religiosity, and that the inclusion of monotheism leads to stronger religiosity. They also conclude that while the adherents of folk religion (i.e. Classes 2-4) are less committed than pure adherents of Western institutionalized religions, they are to some extent more committed than adherents of Eastern institutionalized religions. For example, members of Class 3 (believers of diffused Buddhism and Daoism) were more likely to participate in religious activities and to report a higher importance of religion in their lives than pure followers of Buddhism and Daoism.<sup>17</sup>

**My own comments.** The results of the study by Zhang, Lu and Sheng are in striking contrast to many surveys that attest a low level of religiosity in China. To mention only the WIN/Gallup International survey published in 2015, according to which China was the least religious country in the world: 61% of respondents in China described themselves as

<sup>16</sup> This can be found in Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, pp. 581 and 586-589.

<sup>17</sup> Zhang – Lu – Sheng 2021, pp. 589-590.



convinced atheists, and a further 29% as non-religious.<sup>18</sup> As Zhang, Lu and Sheng themselves note, such differences are explained by the question schemes and survey instruments used in each case. When using the term *zongjiao* 宗教 (“religion”) – which only entered the Chinese language in the 19th century via Japanese – difficulties of understanding are likely to arise in the Chinese context, which leads to a large number of people stating that they are not religious. If, on the other hand, people are asked about concrete beliefs or practices, the percentages are much higher. For example, in the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey (CSLS) carried out in 2007,<sup>19</sup> 58% of respondents said they did not believe in any religion; however, a large proportion of them answered positively to additional questions about religious activity or religious beliefs in the broadest sense, leaving only 15% “pure atheists.” In CSLS, the percentage of folk religion adherents was 55.5%.<sup>20</sup> With both figures, the CSLS is relatively close to the results of Zhang Chunni, Lu Yunfeng and Sheng He.

For the authors’ intention to determine the prevalence and the range of combinations of folk religion in the Chinese population, the method of subsuming all those who claimed more than one religious belief under folk religion adherents was reasonable and purposeful. However, this also leads to the result that only very few “pure” adherents of the five major institutionalized religions remain, namely a total of 5%. One might question whether it always makes sense to discount people who affirm further beliefs from the five major religions. Is a Daoist no longer a Daoist if he also practices geomancy?

Applied to Catholics, the authors’ principle leads to the following curious result: Catholics who believe in both God (*tianzhu*) and Jesus Christ (Yesu Jidu) are not Catholics according to the authors’ definition, but folk religionists because they have stated more than one faith. It should be noted that although Catholic and Protestant Christians in China use different names for “God” (Catholic *tianzhu*, Protestant *shangdi* or *shen* 神), they use the same Chinese name for Jesus Christ – Yesu Jidu. Thus, belief in Yesu Jidu does not seem to me to be a suitable criterion for identifying only Protestant Christians.

It is impressive to see how further insights are gained with new questions and methods in each round of CFPS questions. We can look forward to the evaluation of CFPS 2020.

18 In 2014 WIN/Gallup International asked 63,898 persons world-wide the following question: “Irrespective of whether you attend a place of worship or not would you say you are: a. a religious person, b. not a religious person, c. a convinced atheist, d. do not know/no response.” See WIN/Gallup International 2015.

19 CSLS 2010 – For the CSLS, from May to July 2007, a sample of 7,021 individuals aged 16 to 75 years was interviewed in 56 selected localities of different size as to their religious self-identification. In July 2010, Yang Fenggang from the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University (West Lafayette, USA) presented the results of the study in Beijing.

20 The figure of 55.5% comes from Zhang -Lu - Sheng 2021, p. 577. The paper on CSLS by Yang Fenggang *et al.* that I have does not mention a percentage, but gives the following figures, among others: 215 million Chinese over the age of 16 believed in the existence of ancestral spirits or prayed to them; 754 million practiced ancestor worship. 141 million believed in the existence of the God of Wealth (*caishen* 财神); 145 million had observed *fengshui* restrictions or consulted a *fengshui* master in the past 12 months; 362 million had practiced some form of divination; see CSLS 2010.

## 2. Buddhism

There is still no official data on the number of Buddhists and Daoists in Mainland China. The White Paper on freedom of religious belief (State Council 2018) states that:

*China has numerous Buddhist and Taoist believers, but it is difficult to accurately estimate their numbers as there are no set registration procedures which ordinary believers must follow as part of their religion. [...] China also has many folk beliefs which are closely linked to local cultures, traditions and customs, in which a large number of people participate.*

As the analysis by Zhang, Lu and Sheng discussed in point 1 above showed, many of the respondents in CFPS 2018 believed in Buddha/Bodhisattvas and at the same time also in Daoist deities, sometimes combined with other folk religious belief elements. Here again is the figure determined by the three authors for the followers of Buddhism (see Table 1):

33.4% of the population over 16 years believe in Buddha/Bodhisattvas (of these 2.1% exclusively, i.e. they did not mention any other belief).

For comparison, the figures of the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey (CSLS),<sup>21</sup> which was already conducted in 2007 and still offers some orientation:

185 million self-identify as Buddhists, i.e. 18% of the population above the age of 16.  
17.3 million have taken the triple refuge (in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), i.e. have formalized their adherence to Buddhism through ritual.

In institutionalized Buddhism there are also:

34,090 registered Buddhist sites for religious activities according to NRAA database 2023,<sup>22</sup> of which:

28,528	Han-Chinese Buddhism
3,857	Tibetan Buddhism
1,705	Theravada-Buddhism

222,000 Buddhist religious personnel (monks and nuns) recognised and registered with the authorities according to NRAA 2017 (as also State Council 2018), of which:

72,000	Han-Chinese Buddhism
148,000	Tibetan Buddhism
2,000	Theravada-Buddhism

41 Buddhist Academies (State Council 2018)

Between 2015 and 2020, 32,878 persons [monks and nuns] were ordained (*shoujie* 受戒).<sup>23</sup>

21 Numbers cited here according to CSLS 2010 and Wenzel-Teuber 2012, pp. 30-36.

22 National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) database “Basic Data on Sites for Religious Activities” at [www.sara.gov.cn/gjzjswj/zjjcxcxxt/zjhdcjsjbx/index.shtml](http://www.sara.gov.cn/gjzjswj/zjjcxcxxt/zjhdcjsjbx/index.shtml), retrieved March 20, 2023. These NRAA database figures are unchanged from the last retrievals of March 1, 2021 and March 8, 2022. The results of a detailed search conducted on March 17, 2016 which also takes into consideration the distribution according to province can be found in Wenzel-Teuber 2016, p. 27, Table 1.

23 Work Report at the 10th Buddhist National Assembly 2020, p. 11; cf. Wenzel-Teuber 2022, p. 20.

## 2.1 New Online Database for Officially Accredited and Registered Buddhist Clergy

On 22 February 2023, a “Search System for Data on Buddhist Religious Personnel” 佛教教职人员信息查询系统 went online on the website of the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA), at the same time as a similar search tool for Daoist religious personnel. According to a report of *Zhongguo xinwenwang*, for every Buddhist cleric the database contains details of name, sex, religion, religious discipline and religious office, the serial number of the certificate for religious personnel, as well as a photo. Users must validate themselves with their mobile phone.<sup>24</sup> Access from abroad was not possible, which is why no detailed statements on the functioning of the database can be made here. It is not known how many Buddhist religious personnel are registered there.

The religious affairs authorities have been working for years on a publicly accessible “Search System for Basic Data on the Religions” 宗教基础信息查询系统. A database for registered Buddhist and Daoist sites for religious activities has been accessible on the NRAA website since 2014; it was used for this statistical update (NRAA database 2023). A database for the registered institutes for religious education for all five religions has been online since 2016. All databases of the “Search System for Basic Data on the Religions” can be found at [www.sara.gov.cn/gzjzswj/zjcxccxxt/index.shtml](http://www.sara.gov.cn/gzjzswj/zjcxccxxt/index.shtml) (last accessed on March 20, 2023).

## 2.2 Survey: The Dilemma between Sacred and Secular as a Problem for Young Buddhists in China

What are the problems of young Buddhists in China? This question preoccupied Han Qi in interviews with Buddhist university students in Beijing. According to the result, it is the “dilemma between the sacred and the secular” (*sheng su liangnan* 圣俗两难), specifically, the fusion and connection between Buddhist faith and “real life” (*xianshi shenghuo* 现实生活). By exploring this dilemma, Han Qi hopes to achieve a deeper understanding of how the Sinicization of Buddhism is being implemented today.<sup>25</sup> Han Qi, born in 1982, is a research assistant at the Institute of Marxism of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, with a research focus on atheism and the sociology of religion.<sup>26</sup> Her survey was done on a small scale and is interesting not so much for the statistical data as for the information it contains about, among other things, the attitudes and role of parents. How she links the results of her study with the politically salient issue of Sinicization is also informative.

Han surveyed a sample of 23 students from three universities in the Beijing area. The condition was that the students had had contact with Buddhism for at least three years and described themselves as having a firm faith. Five of the 23 respondents did not meet the three-year criterion [they were nevertheless included in the evaluation]. Three at the most came from the same Buddhist group. 12 were men, 11 women. The average age of

24 “Fojiao, daojiao jiaozhi ren yuan xin xi chaxun xitong shangxian fabu” 2023.

25 Han 2021, p. 91.

26 See her entry on the Institute of Marxism website at [http://myy.cssn.cn/yjry\\_46764/zghyjb/kxywslsjs/201408/t20140806\\_1969077.shtml](http://myy.cssn.cn/yjry_46764/zghyjb/kxywslsjs/201408/t20140806_1969077.shtml) (accessed on March 15, 2023).

those questioned was 27.65 years. 2 of those questioned were Bachelor students, 2 Master students, 19 were PhD candidates. The length of the interviews varied from 43 minutes to 2 hours and 20 minutes. Names and locations were kept anonymous in the evaluation.<sup>27</sup> In which year the survey was made is not stated.

In the analysis of her interviews, Han Qi considers the dilemma of sacred and secular firstly in the family context and secondly in the lives of individuals.

### The Dilemma of Sacred and Secular in the Family

According to Han Qi, Buddhism, as a religion of salvation that strives for detachment from the world, has certain norms of behavior. She names especially vegetarianism, which responds to the command not to kill any living being, and the tendency to “leave the family” (*chu jia* 出家), i.e. to live celibate lives as a monk or nun, stemming from turning away from the world. According to Han, these two attitudes can lead to considerable tension with the secular environment.<sup>28</sup> She exemplifies this in the reaction of parents to their children turning to Buddhism.

Regarding the faith of the respondents’ parents, Han makes the following observations:

The parents of 18 of the 23 respondents did not formally acknowledge any religion. Some parents adhered to forms of folk belief, such as ancestor worship or worship of the god of wealth. Other parents practiced Qigong or believed that there is a God. Some parents were members of the Party and thus atheists, but turned to divination in some situations. Among the parents there were also adherents of Daoism who rejected Buddhism as superstitious. The parents of 3 respondents originally had no faith but turned to Buddhism due to the influence of their child. One of the respondents came from a Buddhist household. Common to all the parents was that they considered family, health and earnings important.<sup>29</sup>

The following reactions of the parents came up:

- A very harmonious connection between the Buddhist faith of the child and the family was only in one of the respondents from a Buddhist household.
- In 2 other cases the parents were aware of their child’s faith and were supportive of it.
- For 11 respondents, the parents knew about the child’s faith and tolerated it, although it sometimes took a long process to get there, which was also influenced by the parents’ experiences with the child’s attitude.
- In the case of 7 respondents, the parents knew about the child’s faith and were permanently against it. The parents’ motives here were mainly the concern that their child would not lead a “normal life” as a “normal person.” A Daoist father worried that the daughter would be betrayed by “superstitious” Buddhism with its “unnatural” taboos. In two cases, the conflicts were ignited by the child’s temporary wish to enter a monastery; in one case, the parents refuse contact to this day.

<sup>27</sup> Han 2021, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

- 2 respondents had not told their parents anything about their faith in Buddhism, so as to avoid conflicts.<sup>30</sup>

According to Han Qi, therefore, the main factor for parental rejection of Buddhism was the parents' concern that their child might become a monk or nun and not start a family.<sup>31</sup> In the category of parents who supported or tolerated the Buddhist faith, the child had pledged not to enter the monastery or had already married. It was also helpful if parents noticed that the child's attitude towards them had improved under the influence of the Buddhist faith. In the case of parents who were permanently opposed to the faith, they were first concerned that the child might make a mistake and choose the wrong path, and later on, hurt by the child's words and deeds. While Han Qi believes that a "democratic," tolerant atmosphere in the family is important, she ultimately sees the key to the conflict and its resolution primarily in the behavior of the Buddhist children towards the parents, such as whether they made communication impossible by reacting extremely to the parents' prejudices and concerns.<sup>32</sup>

### The Dilemma of Sacred and Secular for the Individual

Han Qi also attributes the problems of individuals in practicing their Buddhist faith to the dilemma between sacred and secular as the underlying cause. She distinguishes between two areas:

*Problems with the Buddhist tradition:* Here Han Qi includes e.g. "Difficulties with the vegetarian diet." In the Buddhism of the Han tradition, vegetarianism is a comparatively widespread lifestyle change among converts, according to Han. 50% of her respondents were consistently vegetarian. A further 25% had practiced it for a time but then given it up again, to avoid friction with the environment and not cause any inconvenience.<sup>33</sup>

Only a minority of the respondents kept strictly to the Five Precepts.<sup>34</sup> The majority break them here and there and drink alcohol for instance. The question of how to deal with sexuality was particularly difficult for many. Most respondents went through a process regarding the Five Precepts and, after a period of constant conflict, reached a more pragmatic view – "with more maturity you know how to control yourself sensibly," said one respondent, and according to another person you have to see the rules in the context of life.<sup>35</sup>

The question of whether to become a monk or a nun was also difficult for many. According to Han, the monastic community (*sangha*) is one of the Three Jewels of Buddhism and thus has a very high value; on the other hand, not everyone is suitable for it. Only one

30 Han 2021, pp. 92-93.

31 Han Qi does not report whether the respondents were an "only" child, which would make acceptance of celibacy more difficult for their parents. Considering the age group of the respondents, it is likely that the majority were only children.

32 Han 2021, pp. 93-94.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

34 Chin. *wu jie* 五戒 (Sanskrit *pañcaśīla*). The Five Precepts are to refrain from killing living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and drinking alcohol (不殺生, 不偷盜, 不邪淫, 不妄語, 不飲酒). These apply to all practicing Buddhists (lay and monastics).

35 Han 2021, pp. 94-95.



The Buddhist Longquan Monastery is popular with students. It is located in the Fenghuangling Nature Park in the north of Beijing's Haidian District, which is also home to many universities. Here, a feeding station outside the gates of the monastery. The banner at the entrance to the monastery indicates a Dharma assembly.

Photo: China-Zentrum, 2012.

person in the sample had actually entered a monastery. Three others said they might do so if their parents agreed. Most had thought about it at some point, but family resistance and other factors turned them away. Their relationship with their parents then often improved, according to Han. The Buddhist parents, on the other hand, would have let their son enter the monastery, but he decided against it by himself.<sup>36</sup>

*Problems with the orientation of the faith:* According to Han it is very difficult for young Buddhists university students to find their own way in the faith. Almost half the respondents had participated in courses of a Buddhist group that Han refers to with the pseudonym “Mahayana Teaching of Detachment.” This group is very popular among students, according to Han. Since it emphasizes leaving the world (monasticism), those who seriously engaged in its courses feel a strong inclination towards monastic life and, as a result, there is tension with secular life – Han observes. For the two respondents who had the greatest conflicts with the family, the study course of the “Mahayana Teaching of Detachment” was the permanent Buddhist reference group. The others in the sample gradu-

<sup>36</sup> Han 2021, pp. 95-96.

ally withdrew from it and sought their own path. Han Qi described this path as “practicing immersed in the world” (*ru shi qian xiu* 入世潛修), that is, the attempt to combine the faith with the worldly life.<sup>37</sup>

### The *chu jia* Conflict and Sinicization of Buddhism

Han Qi places the assessment of her survey results under the headings “The Historical Practice of Sinicizing Buddhism: Adaptation” and “The Contemporary Practice of Sinicizing Buddhism.” Even two thousand years after the arrival of Buddhism in China, 39% of the parents of the respondents were permanently and 48% temporarily opposed to their children’s Buddhist faith, with the main point of conflict being the question of *chu jia*, i.e. a life as a monk or nun, Han Qi argues. According to her, this shows that there is still clearly a feeling of something “foreign” about Buddhism, even though most people today hardly think about the fact that it originally came from abroad [i.e. India]. Early in the history of Chinese Buddhism, its opponents had criticized the *sangha* as endangering authority and stability, being unproductive and useless, suitable only for uncivilized people, as well as endangering the traditional order and therefore being immoral, Han says. Of these charges only the moral one remains more or less visible in the psyche of today’s Chinese, she explains, for the family is the foundation of society in ancient China and filial piety the highest virtue. Therefore, according to Han, the ideal of a celibate life goes against the most elementary ethical sensibilities of the Chinese. She says that this is also reflected in the fact that Buddhist apologists have repeatedly tried to reconcile monastic life with traditional Chinese ethics throughout history. After two thousand years, as Han Qi sees it, Buddhist thought has penetrated the marrow of Chinese culture, but Buddhist faith has not been able to weaken the traditional ethic of filial piety.<sup>38</sup>

Han’s finding is that young Buddhists today are confronted mainly by the problem of combining faith and “real life.” They try to find detachment in the midst of the world, that is, both to take into account the feelings of their parents and to conform to the morals of society, and to preserve their own faith. This, thus her interpretation, can be seen as Sinicization of Buddhism practiced from the perspective of the believers: The conflict over the question of *chu jia* that these young Buddhists are confronted with is, at its core, a manifestation of the Sinicization question today. With the exception of Buddhist families, in the Han Buddhist tradition almost every individual who has come to the faith through his or her own choice experiences such a process, in which one’s own course has to be found between family and Buddhist tradition, she says. On the one hand, this is a process of faith, but on the other hand, as Han sees it, it is also a confrontation with cultural differences, with another culture. Through countless such processes, Buddhism has Sinicized itself since time immemorial. Its Sinicization, according to Han Qi, is still not complete today.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Han 2021, pp. 95-96.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

### 3. Daoism

Similarly, as already noted above for Buddhism, there are no official figures on the number of Daoists in Mainland China. A point of reference is provided by the analysis of Zhang, Lu and Sheng discussed in point 1 above, based on data from CFPS 2018. Here again is their figure for Daoist adherents (see Table 1 above):

19.6% of the population over 16 years of age believe in Daoist deities (of which 0.4% exclusively, i.e. they did not name any other belief).

For comparison, we recall the figures of the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey (CSLS) carried out in 2007:<sup>40</sup>

12 million of the adult population clearly identify with Daoism [corresponding to 1,17% of the population above 16 years, kwt].<sup>41</sup>

173 million have exercised some Daoist practices or taken part in such, but these are difficult to distinguish from popular belief.

In institutionalized Daoism there are in addition:

8,349 registered Daoist sites for religious activities according to NRAA-database 2022,<sup>42</sup> of which

4,011 Quanzhen tradition

4,338 Zhengyi tradition

ca. 40,000 Daoist religious personnel (State Council 2018)

10 Daoist academies (State Council 2018)

#### 3.1 New Online-Database for Officially Accredited and Registered Daoist Clergy

On 22 February 2023, a “Search System for Data on Daoist Religious Personnel” 佛教教职人员信息查询系统 went online on the website of the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA). For this new database, which was launched at the same time as a similar search tool for Buddhist religious personnel, see the comments above under point 2.1. Access from outside China was not possible. It is not known how many Daoist religious clerics are registered there.

### 4. Islam

In the People’s Republic of China ten ethnic groups are considered Muslim. Their population size is generally equated with that of Muslims in China in statistics by Chinese

40 Numbers cited according to CSLS 2010 and Wenzel-Teuber 2012, pp. 30-36.

41 The percentage 1.17% was calculated by the author of this statistical update (kwt) by analogy with the data given by CSLS for Buddhists (185 million equals 18% of the population over 16 years).

42 Accessed on March 20, 2023. The number of registered Daoist sites listed in the NRAA database has remained unchanged since 2018.



authorities and scholars. According to the 6th census of 2010, about 23 million people belong to these ten ethnic groups, which is 1.74% of the total population,<sup>43</sup> distributed as follows:

**Table 2: Muslim Population according to Ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Population 2010 (Persons)	Percentage of the Total Muslim Population (%)
Hui	10,586,000	45.74
Uighur	10,069,000	43.51
Kasakh	1,462,600	6.32
Dongxiang	621,500	2.69
Kirghiz	186,700	less than 1
Salar	130,600	less than 1
Tajik	51,100	less than 1
Usbek	10,600	less than 1
Bao'an	20,000	less than 1
Tatar	3,556	less than 1

Data: 2010 census. Table compiled according to Liu Xiaochun 2014, p. 71.

In 2020, the 7th national census took place in the People’s Republic of China. As far as could be ascertained, a detailed evaluation of this census with regard to the Muslim ethnic groups has not yet been published.

According to the White Book (State Council 2018) Islam in the People’s Republic of China has

- 35,000 sites for religious activities [mosques]
- 57,000 religious personnel
- 10 institutes for religious education [Qur’an institutes]

#### 4.1 Muslim Cultural Heritage

On “Muslim cultural heritage” in China, Pascale Bugnon has published an article on the academic blog of the Confucius Institute of the University of Geneva, of which she is a Confucius Institute Fellow.<sup>44</sup> Bugnon is an anthropologist and sociologist with a PhD in Chinese Studies. She has researched the process of listing tombs of Muslim saints and other Muslim sites as national monuments in China – referring to Xinjiang in her Master’s thesis and Southeast China in her PhD thesis published in 2022.<sup>45</sup> The text of her blog entry contains the following figures:

A total of 55 Muslim sites were elevated to national heritage status between 1961 and 2019. In the first list of national monuments in 1961 only one Muslim site was included, namely the Qingjing Mosque of Quanzhou (FJ). The second list in 1982 has no Muslim

43 Liu Xiaochun 2014, pp. 70-71. – In 2014, Liu Xiaochun published an analysis of the population structure of the members of ethnic groups considered Muslim based on data from the last, 6th, national census in China in 2010. It was presented in detail in Wenzel-Teuber 2016, pp. 30-34.

44 Bugnon 2022. I thank Chne Daniel Salzgeber CRB for pointing out this contribution.

45 See [www.unige.ch/ic/equipe/membres-associes/pascale-bugnon](http://www.unige.ch/ic/equipe/membres-associes/pascale-bugnon) (accessed on March 7, 2023).



A national monument since 1988: The Great Mosque of Xi'an, founded in 742. The present buildings were constructed during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. Here a passage gate between two courtyards of the mosque. Photo: Barbara Hoster, 2016.

sites, the list in 1988 seven, that of 1996 one, in 2001 six sites were entered, in 2006 thirteen, in 2013 twenty-four and in 2019 three.

These 55 sites are distributed as follows among China's provinces and autonomous regions:

**Table 3: Muslim Monuments Listed Between 1961 and 2019 at National Level by Province**

Province / Autonomous Region / Municipality	Number of Monuments	Province / Autonomous Region / Municipality	Number of Monuments
Xinjiang	15	Shaanxi	2
Henan	5	Shandong	2
Qinghai	5	Beijing	1
Fujian	4	Gansu	1
Jiangsu	3	Jilin	1
Anhui	2	Shanxi	1
Guangdong	2	Sichuan	1
Hebei	2	Yunnan	1
Heilongjiang	2	Zhejiang	1
Neimeng	2	Total	55
Ningxia	2		

Table created according to data from Bugnon 2022, Graph "Répartition du patrimoine musulman par province et municipalité."



Map: [d-maps.com/carte.php?num\\_car=27749&lang=de](https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=27749&lang=de)

**People's Republic of China: Provinces, Direct-Controlled Municipalities and Autonomous Regions – List of Abbreviations**

AH Anhui, BJ Beijing, CQ Chongqing, FJ Fujian, GD Guangdong, GS Gansu, GX Guangxi, GZ Guizhou, Hain Hainan, HB Hubei, Heb Hebei, Hen Henan, HL Heilongjiang, HN Hunan, JL Jilin, JS Jiangsu, JX Jiangxi, LN Liaoning, NM Inner Mongolia, NX Ningxia, QH Qinghai, SC Sichuan, SD Shandong, SH Shanghai, SN Shaanxi, SX Shanxi, TJ Tianjin, XJ Xinjiang, XZ Tibet, YN Yunnan, ZJ Zhejiang.

The Appendix of Bugnon’s essay has a list of Muslim cultural sites at the national level (1961–2019). From that list the following additional information could be gained:

- Among the 55 Muslim monuments listed across the country there are 31 mosques, 4 minarets and 15 tombs or mausolea.
- The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region has by far the majority of the national Muslim cultural monuments. Of its 15 monuments 8 are tombs and mausolea – presumably due to the very widespread veneration of Sufi saints in Xinjiang.
- Regarding the age of the monuments, 3 of the sites listed are from the Tang era (618–907) – that is the time in which Islam first came to China. They are the minaret of the Huaisheng Mosque and the Tomb of the Ancient Islamic Sage in Guangzhou (GD) as well as the ruins of the Mazar Tagh fortress in Xinjiang, which serve as a Muslim shrine. According to the list, two Muslim monuments are from the Song era (960–1279), 6 from the Yuan era (1279–1368), and all the others from the last two dynasties of the Ming and Qing, as well as the time of the Republic.

According to Bugnon, “Muslim cultural heritage” is not an official category in Chinese heritage protection; Islam is treated as a “cultural feature” of some ethnic minorities rather

than a universal religion. In the course of the State's constant (re)definition of orthopraxy, says Bugnon, "some mausoleums become tourist attractions that allow the government to illustrate its discourse on the richness of 'national traditions,' while others [...] are simply closed."

In 2013, the list of new national monuments was particularly long, with 1,943 sites. Incidentally, it included not only the 24 Muslim monuments mentioned by Bugnon, but also numerous buildings of other religions. As *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* reported at the time, these included 17 Catholic church and seminary buildings, most of them from the early 20th century.<sup>46</sup>

## 5. Protestant Churches

The official figures on Protestantism in China are still those from the work report of the official Protestant governing bodies, Chinese Christian Council and Three-Self Movement, at the 10th National Assembly of Chinese Protestantism in November 2018 (Gao Feng 2018) and from the White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief (State Council 2018):

38 million	believers (Gao Feng 2018 and State Council 2018)
60,000	churches (Gao Feng 2018 and State Council 2018)
14,000	professional clerics (male and female pastors, teachers, presbyters) as well as 22,000 male and female preachers (Gao Feng 2018)
57,000	religious personnel (State Council 2018) <sup>47</sup>
22	theological seminaries (Gao Feng 2018)

The figure of 38 million is presumably based on a study by researchers Lu Yunfeng, Wu Yue and Zhang Chunni (Peking University). In an analysis of religion-related data from the 2012, 2014 and 2016 surveys of the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), they concluded that there were around 40 million Protestants in China in 2016.<sup>48</sup>

There are also higher estimates, such as that of the Pew Forum which in 2011 arrived at the number of 58 million Protestants.<sup>49</sup> In 2020, five researchers and pastors gave their "preferred estimates" of the current number of Protestant Christians in Mainland China to the Protestant portal ChinaSource; these ranged from 50 million to 116 million (the

46 Cf. "News Update on Religion and Church in China March 2 – June 15, 2013," compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, translated by David Streit, in: *RCTC* 2013, No. 3, pp. 3-17, here pp. 3-4.

47 Why the entry for the number of religious personnel / clerics and preachers is so much higher in the State Council's White Paper than in the work report of the Protestant bodies is not clear.

48 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019. Cf. discussion of their detailed study in Wenzel-Teuber 2020, pp. 21-30, here esp. p. 27. On CFPS see above point 1, especially note 4.

49 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (ed.), *Global Christianity. A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population* (with „Appendix C: Methodology for China"), [www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2011/12/ChristianityAppendixC.pdf](http://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2011/12/ChristianityAppendixC.pdf), published on December 19, 2011, last accessed on March 23, 2023; cf. Wenzel-Teuber 2013, p. 21.

latter being an estimate by Yang Fenggang, Purdue University).<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, a decline in the number of Protestant Christians has also been reported by some recently.<sup>51</sup>

## 6. Catholic Church

It has become more difficult to give reliable, statistical data on the Catholic Church in Mainland China. Basis for the following figures are data of the Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Diocese of Hong Kong and its periodical *Tripod*. Account is also taken of the information provided by the official Catholic governing bodies, according to their work report presented at the 10th National Assembly of Representatives of the Chinese Catholic Church in 2022, and the White Paper on freedom of religious belief (State Council 2018). Other important sources are the website of the Shijiazhuang (Heb)-based Catholic newspaper *Xinde* 信德 (*Faith*), [www.xinde.org](http://www.xinde.org) (hereafter abbreviated to *xdo*) and other Chinese Catholic websites.

### 6.1 General Data

#### Faithful

- ca. 10 million total number of Catholics, including both the official and unofficial (Underground) parts of the Church, estimated in *Tripod* 2022, p. 228.
- 6 million number of Catholics according to State data (State Council 2018)

#### Dioceses

- 147 (116 dioceses plus 31 other ecclesiastical circumscriptions), according to the Catholic hierarchy (*Tripod* 2021).
- 98 dioceses according to the figures of the official Church and the Chinese authorities (Work Report at the 10th National Assembly of Catholics 2022).

#### Bishops

- 95 of whom
  - 69 bishops in the official Church
  - 26 bishops in the Underground<sup>52</sup>

50 Joan Pittman, “How Many Christians in China? Preferred Estimates,” three-part series on the portal ChinaSource, 2020, at [www.chinasource.org/resource-library/series-index/how-many-christians-in-china](http://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/series-index/how-many-christians-in-china) (last accessed on March 24, 2023); cf. Wenzel-Teuber 2021, pp. 33-34.

51 For example, two pastors of the official governing bodies of the Protestant churches of Shandong Province and Guangzhou City reported in October 2018 at the “Forum of Christianity Research 2018” organized by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences that the number of Protestant Christians in their area was sinking. See “Kan Baoping mushi: Bu yao jujiao yu neidi jidutu shuliang zhenglun, yao jieli jianzao jiankang jiaohui” 阚保平牧师: 不要聚焦于内地基督徒数量争论, 要竭力建造健康教会 (Pastor Kan Baoping: We should not concentrate on the dispute regarding the number of Protestants in the country, but rather give our best to build up a healthy church), *Fuyin shibao* 福音时报, Nov. 15, 2018; <https://gospeltimes.cn/index.php/portal/article/index/id/46244> (last accessed on March 14, 2023); cf. Wenzel-Teuber 2020, p. 29.

52 These figures also include the emerited bishops. At the end of 2021, 98 bishops had been counted, 71 of them in the official church and 27 in the underground Church, see *Tripod* 2022, p. 228 (same figures in Wenzel-Teuber 2022, p. 26).

### Priests

ca. 4,000 in total in the official and unofficial parts of the Church. How many priests from the Underground have meanwhile become registered is not known (*Tripod* 2022, p. 235).

### Seminaries and Seminarians

6 major seminaries (for priest candidates) with a total of around 350 seminarians in the official Church (*Tripod* 2021).

Thus, of the original 10 seminaries in the official Church of Mainland China, only six are still operating, even though state agencies (e.g. State Council 2018) continue to report their number as nine. No data is available for Underground formation communities.

### Sisters

ca. 5,000 in total, in dozens of congregations in the official and unofficial parts of the Church (*Tripod* 2022, pp. 235f.).

### Churches

4,202 churches and  
2,238 ecclesial sites for activities (Work Report at the 10th National Assembly of Catholics 2022).

## 6.2 Baptisms

The total number of baptisms in Catholic communities of Mainland China in 2022 was not reported. The latest baptismal statistics published by *Xinde* give the number of 48,365 baptisms for 2018.<sup>53</sup> By contrast, the Work Report presented at the 10th National Assembly of Catholics in August 2022 spoke of only “nearly 110,000” baptisms in China between 2016 and 2022.<sup>54</sup>

The following examples show that despite long lockdowns and church closures in 2022, larger baptismal services also took place:

- 40 baptisms, Wenzhou Cathedral, Wenzhou Diocese (ZJ), June 29, 2022: These were participants in the parish’s 21st catechumenate course which began on October 16, 2021 (*xdo* July 4, 2022).
- 101 baptisms, Beijing Cathedral (North Church), Beijing Diocese (BJ), July 16, 2022: On that day, services were allowed to be held in the cathedral again for the first time after six months of closure due to the pandemic (*Fides* July 18, 2022).
- 26 baptisms, Beijing South Church, Beijing Diocese (BJ): On June 30, 2022, 26 faithful from the 72nd (!) catechumenate course of the South Church received their baptismal certificates; the baptisms had mainly taken place earlier in the year (*xdo* Aug. 4, 2022).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Wenzel-Teuber 2019, pp. 24-26.

<sup>54</sup> Work Report at the 10th National Assembly of Catholics 2022.



Baptism of 40 adult catechumens in Wenzhou on June 29, 2022. The people in white sitting on the right and left of the central aisle of the church are the baptismal candidates. Photos: *xdo*.

### 6.3 Priestly Ordinations

Only 15 deacons were ordained as priests in the official part of the Catholic Church in China in 2022 – or at any rate, only 15 ordinations could be identified from the publicly available sources (see Table 4). The number is certainly incomplete; so there are likely to have been more priestly ordinations in the Underground. Even so it is extremely low. The

**Table 4: Priestly Ordinations in the Catholic Church in Mainland China in 2022**

Province / Municipality	Diocese	Number of Ordained	Date of Ordination	Ordaining Bishop*	Names of Those Ordained
CQ	Wanzhou	1	June 29	He Zeqing	Jiang Fuxin 蒋福鑫
FJ	Fuzhou	2	June 29	Lin Jiashan	Lin Feng 林风, Lin Weirui 林位端
Hen	Zhengzhou	1	Aug. 10	Zhang Yinlin, Anyang	Ma Zhao 马昭
SC	Leshan	2	June 29	Lei Shiyin	Xiao Feng 肖锋, Zhou Tao 周涛
SN	Xi'an	2	Oct. 18	Dang Mingyan	Duan Chenyang 段晨阳, Tong Yuanbo 童渊博
SN	Zhouzhi	1	Aug. 22	Wu Qinjing	Li Zeyi 李泽逸
SX	Yuncheng	1	June 13	Meng Ningyou, Taiyuan	Jia Hongwei 贾宏伟
YN	Dali, Zhao-tong	2	July 18	Ma Yinglin, Kunming	Tang Tiancong 唐天丛, Cao Guoxin 曹国新 (Tibetan)
ZJ	Ningbo	3	Aug. 27	Jin Yangke	Gao Dicong 高迪聪, Liu Sheng 刘盛, Yu Liting 俞立挺
Total		15			

\* The diocese is only mentioned here if the ordaining bishop was not the competent local ordinary of the diocese concerned, but was invited from another diocese to perform the ordination.

Sources: *chinacatholic.cn* June 29, 2022; July 22, 2022; *Fides* Jan. 7, 2022; Aug. 3, 2022; *xdo* June 13, 30, 2022; July 8, 2022; Aug. 15, 28, 31, 2022; Jan. 2, 2023.

coming year will show whether this was also due to the prolonged closures of churches and suspension of religious activities in many places because of the Corona pandemic. What is certain, however, is that the number of vocations has been declining sharply for years. In previous years, the following numbers of newly ordained priests were counted: 2021 – 40 new priests; 2020 – 39 new priests; 2019 – 48; 2018 – 75; 2017 – 97; 2016 – 61; 2015 – 59; 2014 – 78; 2013 – 66; 2012 – 78.

#### 6.4 Episcopal Consecrations

No episcopal consecration took place in Mainland China in 2022.

#### 6.5 Public Installation of Bishops Ordained without Government Permission in 2022

Bishop Peng Weizhao 彭卫照 of Yujiang (JX), 2014 episcopal consecration, on November 24, 2022 officially installed as auxiliary bishop of Jiangxi Diocese.

The Holy See protested against the event on November 26, 2022. The Diocese of Jiangxi is not recognized by the Holy See.

#### 6.6 Deceased Bishops in Mainland China in 2022

Bishop Wu Junwei 武俊维, Peter (June 27, 1963 – May 10, 2022), 1990 priestly ordination, 2010 episcopal ordination, Diocese of Yuncheng (SX), 58 years.

Bischof Ye Ronghua 叶荣华, John Baptist (June 20, 1931 – August 28, 2022), 1981 priestly ordination, 2000 episcopal ordination, Diocese of Ankang (SN), 91 years.

Bischof Gao Hongxiao 高宏孝, Joseph (died December 19, 2022), 2005 episcopal ordination, Kaifeng (Hen) Diocese, 77 years.

#### 6.7 Entrance to Novitiates and Vows of Women Religious



Two Sisters took final vows on December 8, 2022 in Guangzhou. Photos: *xdo*.

The vows of women religious are much less regularly reported than priestly ordinations. The entrance to novitiate and vows in Table 5 can, therefore, only be taken as examples. As



with vocations to the priesthood, the number of vocations among women has also been declining sharply for years.

**Table 5: Examples of Entrance to Novitiate and Professions of Women Religious in Mainland China in 2022**

Province	Diocese	Congregation	Date	Entrance to Novitiate	Vows
GD	Guangzhou	Chinese Sisters of the Immaculate Conception	Dec. 8		2 perpetual (Huang Jieqi 黄洁琦, Liu Lili 刘丽丽)
GD	Shantou	Diocesan congregation	Aug. 28		14 temporal
SC	Leshan	Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary	March 25		2 perpetual (Jin Guirong 金桂蓉, Wei Fang 韦芳)
SN	Xi'an	Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart	Feb. 26	2	2 perpetual
ZJ	Ningbo	Helpers of the Holy Souls	June 19		1 perpetual (Weng Changshu 翁常熟, religious name Paulus)
			Aug. 22		1 first profession (Chen Shuangbo 陈双波, religious name Jieru 洁如)

Sources (2022): *xdo* March 2; April 7; Aug. 23, 31; Dec. 9; <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/3S0fUVTsR8bAXxMCEwXavA>.

### 6.8 Priests and Women Religious Deceased in Mainland China in the Year 2022

In 2022, according to statistics published on the *Xinde* (Faith) website by author Ye Sheng, 13 priests died. 6 of them belonged to the younger generation trained after the Cultural Revolution, they were under 60 years old. The other 7 were 80 years old or older.

According to the same statistics, 7 Sisters passed away, 3 of them aged 60 years or younger. The 4 other Sisters were over 80 years. Deceased priests and Sisters in the Underground were not covered by the statistics.

From the fact that almost half of the deceased were middle-aged or belonged to the “young old” (60 to 74 years), the author concludes that the state of health of many priests and Sisters in these age groups is worrying and that the clergy and Sisters of the Chinese Church have entered a phase in which the proportion of the elderly is rapidly increasing.<sup>55</sup>

### 6.9 National Assemblies of Catholics 2022 and 2016 – A Comparison of the Numbers in the Work Reports

From August 18 to 20, 2022, the 10th National Assembly of Representatives of Chinese Catholicism convened in Wuhan. For the first time, the work report presented there by Bishop Shen Bin did not provide official statistical data on the total number of Chinese Catholics, priests, Sisters and seminarians. Instead, it made do with data on “new recruits” of the faithful, priests and Sisters in the last 6 years. In comparison with the figures presented at the 9th National Assembly in December 2016, the following picture emerges:

<sup>55</sup> Ye Sheng 2023. – The number of years of life attained in each case by Ye Sheng differs in part from that given here due to the different counting method customary in China.

**Table 6: National Assemblies of Catholics 2022 and 2016 – A Comparison of the Numbers in the Work Reports**

Data for the official Catholic Church	Work report 2022 for the years 2017–2022	Work report 2016 for the years 2011–2016
Faithful	–	More than 6 million
Persons baptized in the last 6 years	almost 110,000*	–
Dioceses	98	–
Bishops	66	65
Bishops consecrated or installed in the last 6 years**	6 consecrated, 8 transformed and installed	16 [of these 13 consecrated, 3 installed]
Priests	–	3,100
Priests ordained in the last 6 years	289***	–
Sisters	–	5,800
Sisters in vows newly entered in the last 6 years	161	–
Churches and ecclesial sites for activities	4,202 churches and 2,238 ecclesial sites for activities	more than 6,000
Theological seminaries	–	9
Seminarians	–	468
Study returnees from abroad in the database of the official Catholic bodies	over 400, of whom 35 with doctoral and 230 with master's degrees ****	–
Bibles printed in the last 6 years	550,000, over 100,000 were delivered gratis to needy areas	–
Church donations for charitable purposes made in the last 6 years	173 million RMB	185 million RMB

Data from: Work Report at the 9th National Assembly of Catholics 2016 and Work Report at the 10th National Assembly of Catholics 2022.

\* 110,000 new baptisms is a very low figure for six years, given that the same bodies reported baptism numbers as high as 100,000 per year in 2011 and a survey conducted by *Xinde* (see point 6.2 above) arrived at 48,365 people being baptized nationwide in 2018 alone.

\*\* Of the 16 bishops mentioned for the period 2011 and 2016 in the work report, by the author's own count 13 were newly consecrated (two of them without papal appointment), and 3 bishops consecrated without government permission were officially installed. In addition to these 13 official episcopal ordinations, at least 5 other episcopal ordinations took place in secret during the same period, and another (Ma Daqin's episcopal ordination in Shanghai) took place with official permission but was subsequently deemed invalid by the authorities. Between 2011 and 2016, therefore, at least 19 episcopal consecrations took place, far more than in the years 2017 to 2022, when – despite the provisional Sino-Vatican agreement on episcopal appointments of 2018 – there were only 6 episcopal consecrations. The term “transformed” (*zhuanhua* 转化) means the “conversion” of clergy from the Underground to registered clergy of the official part of the Church.

\*\*\* 289 priestly ordinations: This number is slightly lower than the one identified in the “Statistical Updates” in *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* for the years 2017–2021, where 299 priestly ordinations were counted; in addition, there were 9 ordinations in 2022 before the 10th National Assembly of Catholics took place in August.

\*\*\*\* This certainly refers to those returning from studies since the beginning of the study abroad programs in the 1990s, not just in the last 6 years.

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## Editorial

Dear Readers,

Today we present to you the May 2023 issue of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* (中國宗教評論) – the second issue this year.

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.

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber has again compiled “Statistics on Religions and Churches in the People's Republic of China” with an “Update for the Year 2022.” This year, she first focuses on traditional folk beliefs which are not officially counted as religion but are now partly tolerated and sometimes even encouraged by the authorities. For Buddhism, there are findings from a survey of Buddhist students on the compatibility of faith and “real” life, for Islam there are figures on “Muslim cultural heritage.”

Professor He Guanghu 何光沪, Prof. em. at Renmin University of China, is an outstanding representative of research on Christianity in China. In a preface to the forth-coming book by Tseng Shaokai 曾劭愷 (ed.), *Wenhua xuanjiao* 文化宣教 (“Cultural Mission”), Jidujiao wenyi chubanshe 基督教文艺出版社, Taiwan (planned for summer 2023), Prof. He offers insightful observations and profound suggestions for the possible inspiration of the Christian faith for the China today, addressing especially the levels of culture, morals, and politics.

Dr. Barbara Hoster, Monumenta Serica Institute in Sankt Augustin, in her article “How Did the Rabbit Get on the Moon? Notes for the Year of the Rabbit” gives interesting insights into the rabbit in Chinese mythology and folklore.

*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, May 2023*

*The Editors*

## 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](http://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/](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.xinde.org/show/53486) with list of CPPCC religious delegates; [www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/newcppcc/mzhzjwyh/index.shtml](http://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](http://www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/23010001-1.htm); [www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202301/t20230106\\_11003073.shtml](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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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**Preface to Tseng Shaokai 曾劭愷 (ed.), *Wenhua xuanjiao* 文化宣教 (“Cultural Mission”), *Jidujiao wenyi chubanshe* 基督教文艺出版社, Taiwan (planned for summer 2023)**

*He Guanghu*<sup>1</sup>

*Translated by Leopold Leeb, Revised by He Guanghu*

## I.

When we use the term “Jidujiao” (Christianity) in its wider sense as encompassing Catholic, Orthodox, and ancient “eastern” churches, we can say it entered China in the seventh century, as everyone knows, but only one millennium later, in the seventeenth century, was it able to become rooted in the Chinese soil, and its survival would no longer be dependent on the benevolence or antipathy of a ruler (for example, Wuzong of Tang Dynasty, reigned 840–846 AD, tried and did rather successfully eradicate the Christian communities), nor would the Christian faith disappear with the end of a dynasty, as happened at the end of the Mongol era (1368), but not with the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644. This great permanence was hard to achieve, and one may ask, aside from the grace of God, by what kind of human efforts was it possible?

The answer is the “cultural mission” represented by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and other Jesuit missionaries, who were able to gain a foothold in the Ming Empire which was then in a state of self-isolation. Those missionaries could survive the invasion of the foreign Manchus in 1644 which brought about radical changes, and they even managed to gain a position in the royal court of the Manchus, the sworn enemy of the Ming Dynasty. Even more, the missionaries were able to continue their work and spread the faith also when the favorable attitude of Emperor Kangxi (reigned 1662–1722) changed to the opposite, and during the cruel suppressions of his successors; they could ensure that the number of believers in China did not drop until the mid-nineteenth century when Protestant missionaries commenced their work in China and the ban on Christianity was lifted. ... They were able to achieve all this because they took the “cultural mission” as their missionary policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor He Guanghu 何光沪 (born 1950) is an outstanding representative of research on Christianity in China. He first worked at the Institute for World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and from 2001 at Renmin University of China.  
We publish Leopold Leeb's English translation with the kind permission of the author and the publisher of the publication *Wenhua xuanjiao*.

It is generally accepted that Matteo Ricci and his companions were well acquainted with the most advanced achievements of western culture and science in that era, and they were good at putting their knowledge into practice; they also seriously tried to understand the best elements of Chinese culture, and so they learned a lot from Chinese scholars in a humble way, which enabled them to become profound mediators and outstanding translators between the cultures of the east and the west ... . Of course, they did not give up the “announcement of the gospel” because of their “cultural mission,” otherwise Ricci would not have produced his book *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shi yi* 天主實義), and there would not have been any converts like Xu Guangqi and later so many pious and devout Christians on all social levels, including members of the imperial family and peasants in the rural areas. Nor was their manifest love for China a cunning trick (as some Chinese scholars say), otherwise the following historical events and many similar ones would have been impossible: Fr. Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666), a German, produced hundreds of cannons for the Chinese government and made the accurate lunar calendar for China, even though he was falsely accused and imprisoned; Fr. Andreas Wolfgang Koffler (1603 or 1612–1651), an Austrian, sacrificed his life in the effort to bring in a troop to save the defeated Ming Dynasty; Fr. Michał Boym (c. 1612–1659) from Poland died in a foreign land because he strove to fulfill the orders of the Ming court.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Manchu government formally protected Christianity, but the local officials and scholars opposed the faith, and in this hostile environment Christian communities began a precarious growth. Gradually they were even able to develop an ever deepening influence on nearly all aspects of Chinese society. The basis of these achievements was of course the “grassroot evangelization” done by missionaries in poor and remote rural areas among the men and women in the villages, for example the work of men like Hudson Taylor (1832–1905), but they also owed very much to the “cultural mission” among the city dwellers, among the scholars and officials, exemplified by the work of Timothy Richard (1845–1919).

In the first half of the twentieth century when there were much more open conditions in China, Christians were still a very small minority in the Chinese population, however, they did not only spread the gospel faith but also were able to cause an unprecedented and far-reaching profound transformation of the whole society through their efforts in health care and medical service, public and higher education, improvement of living habits and mores, press and publications, and so on. This meant great progress in terms of social life and spiritual life. Looking back at those years we are really obliged to express our gratitude to and admiration for men like Young John Allen (1836–1907), John Leighton Stuart (1876–1962) and innumerable other pioneers of the “cultural mission”! Of course, one must not overlook that in those decades there emerged many Chinese exponents of “cultural mission,” outstanding scholars like Ma Xiangbo (1840–1939), Wu Leichuan (1870–1944), Zhao Zichen (1888–1979) and Xie Fuya (1892–1991).

As everyone knows, the strained environment of Mainland China from the 1950s to the 1970s led to serious shrinking, even dying, of Christian activities, and all the churches entered a state of “hibernation.” From the 1980s to the 1990s, Christianity was allowed a revival and some development, which was mainly visible in rural churches which coura-

geously stepped out of their underground existence and grew up rapidly. Around the turn of the century, the more obvious and important was the growth of Christian communities in the cities and especially the “house churches” which bubbled up and developed gradually. Another fact which should not be ignored but is less well known is that the emergence of city churches with more members having higher education was a side product of the movement of translation, research, publication and spread of Christian knowledge, which was known as “Christian culture fever” in those years. It also had invisible but deep relations to the search for a way out of the spiritual predicament. Even if one must say that most of the scholars involved in it were not Christians and were not following an agenda of “cultural mission,” but seeing from an objective viewpoint, their work had the effects of a cultural evangelization.

## II.

When I read the first article of this collection, an inspiring essay by Dr. Shehe 舍禾, I felt that it was a corroboration of my considerations concerning the significance of “cultural mission.” However, my first feeling was deep admiration, as I was profoundly moved.

As to the many profounder questions related to “cultural mission,” Pastor Chen Zongqing 陈宗清 has given a very detailed account in his “introduction” to this collection, which I not only appreciate very much but which also inspired me to recommend this book to the readers.

Of course, the main reason why I want to recommend the collection is its content: the Chinese church leaders and intellectual champions in their respective fields of theological knowledge have contributed outstanding essays covering almost all aspects of this big issue, including not only conclusive reviews of the past practice and history of “cultural mission,” but also creative visions of the theory and future of cultural evangelization! I believe that any reader will agree with me after a short perusal of its table of contents. Concerning these issues, the present volume can open up many layers of reflection and many aspects of related matters, and here is the exactly irreplaceable value of this collection.

## III.

Anthropological, archeological and historical researches have revealed that human beings have been creating “culture” already for tens of thousands of years, but that they have created “civilization” only since several thousands of years ago. The two concepts are very different though they are closely related to each other. Culture is a specific way of life peculiar to human beings and different from all other living beings. Civilization is a whole system of political, economic and social institutions and other mores, emerging from a certain culture and pertaining in a certain region.

Chinese culture is the specific way of life of the Han people and the assimilated parts of the way of life of the surrounding peoples. Chinese civilization is the whole system of political, economic and social institutions and other mores originating in Chinese culture and belonging to Chinese territory.



Recently I have been pondering on some basic issues of “Chinese culture” (*Zhonghua wenhua* 中华文化 which should be called *Huaxia wenhua* 华夏文化, to use a term which has less ethnic and geographic connotations). What are the true connections of this culture to the “Chinese civilization” (*Zhongguo wenming* 中国文明) which has been actualized on Chinese territory or mainland for several millennia?

A friend invited me to give a speech to a group of Chinese Christians (most of them are quite proud of “Chinese culture” which is often confused with “Chinese civilization”), and she wrote me two questions as the speech topic suggested to me (each of the six speakers was assigned a topic concerning Chinese culture): “Chinese culture: What is its spirit? Where does its soul return to?” (*Zhonghua wenhua: linghun he zai?* 中华文化, 灵魂何在? *Hun gui he chu?* 魂归何处?)

The first question is very clear: What is the spirit of Chinese culture? But the second question must have a hidden premise: The soul has already gone, or it will soon go (leave), only then can it go to or return to some place. Only if the body has died or will soon die, can one ask how it will be reborn! Therefore, I changed my topic in this way: “What is the spirit of Chinese culture? Where will the soul of Chinese civilization return to?”, as in the use of these metaphors, Chinese culture or *Huaxia* culture should be the soul (i.e. *hun* 魂 in Chinese, *psyche* in Greek), Chinese civilization should be the body (i.e. *ti* 体 in Chinese, *soma* in Greek), and both should be different from the spirit (i.e. *ling* 灵 in Chinese, *pneuma* in Greek).

Now that many elements of “Chinese culture” or *Huaxia* culture are still preserved among the Chinese throughout the world, and some elements are alive in the cultures of Japan, Korea, Vietnam and some other nations, therefore, the thing which has died or will soon die is not Chinese culture. Then, what is it? The answer can only be “Chinese civilization.” As we all know, cultures can start, develop, spread and get renewed; civilizations can be born, grow, decline and die – many cultural traditions of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome have been preserved even until today, but their civilization systems have died since long ago. The civilizations of Mesopotamia, of Maya, Inca and Aztecs, and most of the thirty odd civilizations enlisted in Arnold Toynbee’s *A Study of History* have died or disappeared many centuries ago. According to Toynbee, most civilizations have died because of their inner corruption, making them unable to respond to challenges from inside or from outside. The cause of their death was always some kind of “suicide,” rather than some kind of “murder.” In other words, a civilization is like a human being: going from birth through aging and disease to death is very normal. However, the decline of a civilization is a process of loss of spirit.

Many people see the civilization of India as one of the old great civilizations which can be compared with the Chinese civilization. Indian civilization has spread Hinduism and Buddhism to many parts of the world but, according to my observations, the old Indian civilization, built on the caste system and including corresponding political, economic and social institutions, has died or will soon die, because it is incompatible with the present democratic politics, market economy and egalitarian society (where even a person from the lowest caste can be elected president) in India. And in the similar way, the old Chinese civilization, which has spread some cultural elements of Confucianism, Buddhism and

Daoism to many parts of the world, can be said to be dead or at least to be moribund and facing the end! This is because Chinese civilization centered on the totalitarian power of the “Son of Heaven” (*tianzi* 天子, the emperor), with corresponding political institution (as Mao said, “hundred generations have kept the Chin’s political institution” [*bai dai jie xing Qin zhengzhi* 百代皆行秦政制]), economic institution (as *The Book of Songs* said, “All land belongs to the king” [*pu tian zhi xia mofei wang tu* 溥天之下莫非王土]), and social institution (also as *The Book of Songs* said, “All people are subjects of the king” [*shuaitu zhi bin mofei wang chen* 率土之濱莫非王臣]), and all this is in confrontation with modern civilization and with political democracy, economic freedom and social rights which are urgently needed for the life and the development of the Chinese people. This dying condition is caused by the “loss of spirit,” which is exactly what the Chinese idioms mean: “Losing one’s soul and mind” (*shi hun luo po* 失魂落魄) and “Soul flying away and mind being shattered” (*hun fei po san* 魂飞魄散)!

Any body of civilization needs to have the soul of culture, and the latter needs to have the spirit of heavenly revelation. The body of Chinese civilization originally had the soul of Chinese culture, and the soul of Chinese culture originally had the spirit of the “mandate of heaven” (*tian ming* 天命), which was what Christian theologians called the “universal revelation.” From the expression “mandate of God” (*di ming* 帝命) in the oracle bone inscriptions, through the expression “mandate of Heaven” (*tian ming*) in *The Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 诗经) and *The Book of History* (*Shujing* 书经), to the expression “God of August Heaven” (*huangtian shangdi* 皇天上帝) on the tablets in the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, countless documents show that the “spirit” (*ling* 灵) of Chinese culture was the belief in God and the “mandate received from Heaven” (*shou tian zhi ming* 受天之命).

However, around three thousand years ago, the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhou li* 周礼) decreed that “If you are not the king you cannot offer sacrifices to God” (*bu wang bu di* 不王不禘), which meant only the “Son of Heaven” (only the king or emperor) was entitled to practice the rites to God. Then this led to an estrangement of the Chinese people from God. It also led to the evacuation of “God of heaven” who was originally a personal god; in this way the idea of God gradually became very remote, abstract, vague and empty. Furthermore, around two thousand years ago, the first emperor of the Chin Dynasty (221–207 BC, also the first of China) implemented centralized rule, becoming an autocrat with absolute totalitarian power and authority above all laws. As such a political institution, with the really absolute monarchs who were called the “Sons of Heaven” even if they were villains, has been persisting for most of the time in Chinese history, all the people finally became the “slaves” (as the Chinese word *chen*, the subject, originally means) of the rulers. Therefore, the concept of the “Son of Heaven” which was originally an empty fiction became a real supreme power and highest authority in this world, all the people could see no more “sacred” authorities other than this one, and had to subject to this power, no matter how absurd it looked. This can be compared to the genetic defect in a baby’s brain which resulted in a cancerous tumor in adulthood and affected the functioning of all organs, and the disease finally spread to the whole system of the body, causing the death of the person.

The idea of the “Son of Heaven” was originally a fictional and empty concept in Chinese culture, but surprisingly it could exert such a real and central and fatal influence on Chi-

nese civilization! This shows how vital the pervasive impact of culture could be, whether it be the positive impact of good and beneficial elements or the negative impact of evil and vicious elements, therefore, those who work as evangelizers must not overlook these influences. Of course, this also shows that the theme of this book has a profound significance.

Chinese culture has gradually been estranged from the belief in God for a long time. It could return to its origin and make a new start, if it prepared to receive a new Spirit and a new Mandate, that is to accept the special revelation from God, to convert to the Savior and to extol Jesus Christ, the really true “Son from Heaven”, the Son of God.

The vocation of Chinese “cultural mission” is just to help Chinese culture approach this destination.

March 6, 2023

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

(Translator’s note: Professor He’s thesis of the gradual alienation of the Chinese people from their original belief in the personal God [Shangdi 上帝] and in Heaven [Tian 天] is very close to the thought processes of Matteo Ricci, and in conversation Professor He also confirmed this affinity, he is aware of it. Professor He has also repeatedly stated this view in previous papers).

## How Did the Rabbit Get on the Moon? Notes for the Year of the Rabbit

Barbara Hoster

Translated by Sr. Jacqueline Mulberge SSpS

On January 22, 2023 the Year of the Rabbit began in China. The rabbit (*tuzi* 兔子) is the fourth animal in the Chinese zodiac signs. This year, which according to the traditional counting is *guimao* 癸卯, it is connected with the element water.

Since the beginning of the Zhou era (11th century BC) jade animal figures were given as supplementary gifts in tombs but they were also jewellery pendants or utility items favoured by the upper class – and among them we find many figures of rabbits.



Two jade rabbits carved from a single pebble. The object's flat underside suggests that it was used as a paperweight. China, 14–15 centuries (Yuan or early Ming Dynasty). H. 3.8 cm, w. 6 cm, l. 7.6 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Florance Waterbury, in memory of her father, John I. Waterbury, 1968. Open Access.

According to an ancient mythological idea, the rabbit lived on the moon, which led to its epithet “Moon Rabbit” (*yuetu* 月兔) or also “Jade Rabbit” (*yutu* 玉兔), because of its white fur. How the rabbit got there can be traced back to a Buddhist legend from India: Buddha, in the guise of a hungry and lost pilgrim, begged the animals of the forest for help. Whereas the jackal and the otter brought their own booty to the pretend pilgrim,

the rabbit offered itself as food and threw itself for him into the fire. Buddha rewarded the rabbit's self-sacrifice by placing him on the moon as a shining example.<sup>1</sup>

Typical representations dating back to Chinese Daoism show the Moon Rabbit standing on his hind legs under a cinnamon tree in the courtyard of the Moon Palace, where he uses a mortar and pestle to make the elixir of immortality from the bark of the cinnamon tree. That is why the rabbit is also a symbol of long life. On the moon he joins the other inhabitant of this celestial body, the moon goddess Chang'e 嫦娥 ("Eternally Exalted"), wife of the mythical archer Hou Yi 后羿. She had stolen the pill of immortality from her husband and therefore fled to the moon, where as a punishment she was changed into a three-legged toad.<sup>2</sup> The cosmological idea of toad and rabbit as inhabitants of the moon is very old. The two can already be seen on the famous "soul banner" of the Western Han period (207–9 BC) on a crescent moon – the banner was found in the tombs of Mawangdui in Changsha and represents the ascent of a deceased person to the immortals.<sup>3</sup>



Moon Rabbit with mortar and pestle, depicted in H.Y. Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu: The Life Cycle of a Peking Man*, vol. II, Peking: The Peking Chronicle Press 1941, p. 34. Copy in the library of the Monumenta Serica institute.

The moon is a very popular motif in Chinese painting and poetry – it was particularly often sung about by the famous “poet prince” of the Tang period, Li Bai 李白 (also Li Taibo 李太白, 701–762). In the following poem, Li Bai immortalised the mythical inhabitants of the moon and thus also the moon rabbit:

- 1 Julie Bredon – Igor Mitrophanow, *The Moon Year: A Record of Chinese Customs and Festivals*, Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh 1927, pp. 407-409.
- 2 Bredon – Mitrophanow, *The Moon Year*, pp. 412-414. There the moon goddess is called “Hèng O” (Hèng O 嫦娥). On the myth of Chang'e, see also Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction*, Baltimore – London: John Hopkins University Press 1993, pp. 144-145 (“Chang O Escapes to the Moon”).
- 3 See Ulrich Wiesner (ed.), *Herbstmond über der Tauterrasse: Der Mond in der Kunst Ostasiens* [Autumn Moon over the Dew Terrace: The Moon in East Asian Art], Cologne: Museum of East Asian Art 1990, p. 11.

As a boy I did not yet know the moon.  
 I called it a white marble disc,  
 I thought it was a shining, bright mirror,  
 Flying through the blue fringes of the clouds.  
 I also saw the hidden moon fairy beckoning  
 And saw the Cassia tree's dense foliage.  
 The white rabbit was pounding herbs in a mortar  
 Of eternal life. Who will get them?  
 Then the evil toad came crawling along  
 And maliciously gobbled up the bright disc. –  
 Once there was an archer, shot nine sunbirds,  
 Then the world was purified and at rest.  
 But there the woman in the moon only beguiles you. –  
 Desist, desist, and look not at her! –  
 Why does this yearning creep quietly into my heart  
 And fill my eyes with tears.<sup>4</sup>

In the pantheon of Chinese popular belief the rabbit is venerated as a deity. It has an important role as moon rabbit and rabbit god in the Chinese annual cycle, namely on the moon festival or mid-autumn festival (Zhongqiujie 中秋節), that is celebrated on the 15th day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar. Before this festival, brightly painted clay figures depicting the rabbit god Tu'er ye 兔兒爺 – usually dressed in martial garments and riding horses or tigers – were traditionally hawked in shops in Beijing. Such figures of the rabbit god were very popular as gifts or toys for children.<sup>5</sup> They even found their way into the proverbial sayings typical of Beijing (*xiehòuyǔ* 歇後語), such as in this example: “Rabbit gods are fighting – a shambles in the stall” (*Tu'er ye dajia – san tanzi* 兔兒爺打架—散攤子). This figuratively means “to break up a business” or “to go separate ways.”<sup>6</sup>

At the Moon Festival, families in China sacrificed to the Moon Rabbit on specially arranged house altars.<sup>7</sup> Depictions of the moon rabbit with its mortar also decorate the round moon cakes (*yuebing* 月餅 or *tuanyuan bing* 團圓餅) eaten on the occasion of the family reunion (*tuanyuan* 團圓) for the Moon Festival. The size of the moon cake tradi-

4 The German translation, on which the English is based, is by the well-known China missionary Richard Wilhelm, quoted from *Li Tai-bo: Rausch und Unsterblichkeit* [Intoxication and Immortality], selected by Günther Debon, Munich *et al.*: Kurt Desch 1958, p. 50. The Chinese original is called “Gu lang yue xing” 古朗月行.

5 See the description and illustration of such a figure in H.Y. Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu: The Life Cycle of a Peking Man*, vol. II, Peking: The Peking Chronicle Press 1941, pp. 32-33. – The photo of a stall with figurines of the rabbit god is included in Bredon – Mitrophanow, *The Moon Year*, after p. 404.

6 Cf. Elke Spielmanns-Rome – Wolfgang Kubin (eds.), *Wörterbuch der chinesischen Sagwörter (Xièhòuyǔ)* 汉德歇后语词典 [Dictionary of Chinese Sayings], Hamburg: Buske 2009, p. 391. More examples of sayings with the rabbit god are to be found on this and the following page.

7 The cover of Lowe's book, *The Adventures of Wu*, shows a house altar on the moon festival in a typical Peking house courtyard; on the altar is the paper figure of a moon rabbit. Lowe's book entertainingly depicts Beijing customs and traditions that were still alive in the city in the first half of the 20th century. The author was probably a Beijing native named Lu Xingyuan 盧興源, about whom nothing more is known. – See also the account of a similar Moon Festival ceremony in Bredon – Mitrophanow, *The Moon Year*, pp. 400-401.

tionally depended on the number of family members into which the cake was divided to be eaten together as a good omen for family unity.<sup>8</sup>

In more recent times a tribute was paid to the close connection of the rabbit with the moon in space travel. A Chinese space probe named “Yutu” (Jade Rabbit) landed on the Earth’s satellite in 2013, making China the third nation to successfully land on the moon.

At the end of the two-week Spring Festival, the Lantern Festival, which is celebrated on the 15th day of the first month of the new year, the rabbit is very much present in Shanghai. You can buy all kinds of rabbit lanterns, in all colours and shapes, around the Yu 豫 Garden in Shanghai’s old town. Originally they had a frame made of bamboo, but today it is mostly made of metal. Plastic rabbits are now also common. Incidentally, rabbit lanterns are not only on offer in Shanghai in the Year of the Rabbit but at every lantern festival.<sup>9</sup>



Rabbit lanterns in Shanghai, 2015. Photograph by Dagmar Borchard. Reprinted with kind permission.

Shanghai is also the origin of the popular “White Rabbit” brand of milk chews (*dabaitu naitang* 大白兔奶糖), which have been produced by the Guanshengyuan 冠生園 company since 1959. In addition to the original vanilla flavour, they are now available in various flavours, but as in the past, individually wrapped in two layers of paper, wax paper on the outside, printed with the iconic blue-white-red rabbit motif, and edible rice paper on the inside. For many Chinese, the sweets evoke nostalgic childhood memories.

One of the two Year of the Rabbit stamps launched by the PRC Post Office in early January recently caused quite a stir. The cartoonish image of a blue rabbit with red eyes holding

8 Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu*, p. 35.

9 My thanks go to Dagmar Borchard for the information about the Shanghai rabbit lanterns, the picture and other suggestions for this article.

a fountain pen in one hand (not paw!) and a piece of writing in the other is by the artist Huang Yongyu 黄泳玉 (b. 1924), who is well-known as well as infamous for his teasing images. His “demonic” rabbit portrayal immediately sparked an argument among Chinese netizens: The rabbit was interpreted as the “Omicron Rabbit”, which kept a list of the Corona-dead at the height of the pandemic in China. Many saw the stamp value of 1.20 yuan, the current postage for a domestic letter, as an allusion to the Chinese emergency number 120. The debate about the motif of the “ugly rabbit” certainly had a sales-promoting effect; the special stamp, which was printed in large numbers, was sold out shortly after it was issued. In a short video, Huang, soon to be ninety-nine years old, tried to smooth the waters around his work, justifying himself by saying that he had only wanted to give pleasure with his rabbit painting. The blue colour of the rabbit is an allusion based on homophony: *lantu* 藍兔 (blue rabbit) is meant as a New Year’s wish and means something like “great plans” (*hongwei lantu* 宏偉藍圖).<sup>10</sup>



Blue rabbit stamp by Huang Yongyu for Chinese New Year 2023. Photograph by China-Zentrum.

In actual fact, the blue of the stamp motif was perceived as a bad omen, since auspicious rabbits are traditionally depicted in white or red in China. That Huang Yongyu is an artist who is well versed in the history of Chinese painting is proven by his second stamp this year for the Year of the Rabbit: It shows three rabbits in white, yellow and light blue running in a circle on a red background. In the middle, like a faint stamp imprint, is the image of the Moon Rabbit with its mortar. The motif of the rabbits arranged in a circle is a clear allusion to a 1,500-year-old depiction of rabbits in the Mogao 莫高 caves in Dunhuang 敦煌. The famous painting of the “Three Rabbits with Common Ears” from the Sui Dynasty (581–618) shows three rabbits running in a circle, whose heads – in contrast to Huang’s painting – are all in the middle of the circle and are painted so close that together

10 On the debate around stamps and other work of Huang Yongyu see Johnny Erling, “New Year Rabbit from Hell,” China.Table, last update Jan. 20, 2023, <https://table.media/china/en/opinion/new-year-bunny-from-hell>.





Three rabbits in white, yellow and light blue running in a circle with the matching stamp envelope for the year 2023. Photograph by China-Zentrum.

the rabbits have only three ears.<sup>11</sup> This particular motif of the three rabbits moved along the Silk Road to Europe, where it can be found in many churches – including the well-known “Three Rabbit Window” in the late Gothic cloister of Paderborn Cathedral. In the Christian context, the motif symbolises the Divine Trinity.<sup>12</sup> Because of the controversy surrounding the “Hell Rabbit”, this second special stamp of Huang Yongyu for the Year of the Rabbit was hardly noticed in China – apart from some critics who also saw an allusion to the Corona pandemic in the moon rabbit visible in the background, pounding medicine with his mortar.

Huang Yongyu’s blue rabbit seems to contradict some of the qualities commonly attributed to this much-loved animal in China, namely amiability and a sense of harmony. But its mischievous laugh also hints at the rabbit’s ability to react quickly, to suddenly take to its heels and to seize favourable opportunities. All these qualities could have a favourable influence on the Year of the Rabbit and ensure global and individual happiness!

11 On this motif in relation to Huang Yongyu’s stamp and other depictions of rabbits in the history of Chinese painting, see Wu Haiyun, “How an Aging Artist Put His Stamp on the New Year”, *Sixthtone* Jan. 21, 2023, [www.sixthtone.com/news/1012134](http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1012134).

12 On the Three Rabbits Window see the PDF “More on the Three Rabbits Symbolism” on the following website: [www.paderborn.de/tourismus-kultur/sehenswuerdigkeiten/Hasenfenster\\_Sehensw.php](http://www.paderborn.de/tourismus-kultur/sehenswuerdigkeiten/Hasenfenster_Sehensw.php). My thanks go to Fr. Martin Welling SVD for the reference to the Paderborn Three Rabbits Window.

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