

## News Update on Religion and Church in China March 25 – July 15, 2023

Compiled by Katharina Feith, Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle) and Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, with a contribution by Dirk Kuhlmann

Translated by David Streit SVD

The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum ([www.china-zentrum.de](http://www.china-zentrum.de)). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2023, No. 2, pp. 3-17) covered the period November 28, 2022 – March 26, 2023.

### Society

May 2023:

#### Youth unemployment at peak levels

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, youth unemployment in China’s urban areas hit a record 20.8 percent in May, up from 20.4 percent in April. This means that every fifth young Chinese in the cities is unemployed. As *Der Spiegel* writes, the number takes into account 16 to 24-year-olds in urban areas. Viewed across all age groups, the general unemployment rate remained constant at 5.2 percent compared to the previous month. In China, however, the unemployment rate does not give a complete picture of the situation, as it is only calculated for urban areas, according to *Der Spiegel*. In addition, there are currently – also due to the pandemic – more university graduates than ever before who are entering into the job market. Before the coronavirus pandemic, in April 2019, the unemployment rate was less than half that, at 9.9 percent, according to *China Table*: “A regulatory crackdown on the internet and education sectors in 2022 led to mass layoffs in the industries highly popular among young employees and recent graduates. Young people in China are increasingly educated, but there is a mismatch between their expectations and the opportunities the market currently offers. (*China Table* May 24; [www.ndrc.gov.cn](http://www.ndrc.gov.cn) May 30; *Der Spiegel* June 15; ZDF June 13). kf

### Religious Policy

April 6, 2023:

#### Conference on Sinicization of Religious Rites at the Central Institute for Socialism

The United Front High-End Think Tank of the Central Institute of Socialism has launched a series of studies on “Educational Materials on Sinicizing Religious Rites” (宗教礼仪中国化课程讲义). This

can be learned from the report on the small conference – the photo shows 16 participants – on April 6 on the same topic. Professor [and Dharma Master] Shengkai from Tsinghua University presented the overall plan of the project. Four experts, including [Dharma Master] Nengren, Editor-in-Chief of *Fojiao yanjiu* (Buddhist Studies), Daoist priest Li Shaohua, Deputy Secretary-General of the Chinese Daoist Association, Li Lin, researcher at the Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and You Bin, professor at Minzu University of China, shared detailed plans and focus of research on this topic from the perspectives of Buddhism, Daoism, Islam and Christianity (*Wei xin zongjiao* [official WeChat account of the National Religious Affairs Administration] according to [www.daoisms.com.cn](http://www.daoisms.com.cn) April 17). Concrete content and goals of the project can not be found in the report. The Central Institute of Socialism regularly organizes training courses for religious personnel. *kwt*

May 23, 2023:

## Online search engines for officially recognized Muslim, Protestant and Catholic religious personnel go live

While reference engines for Buddhist and Daoist religious personnel had already gone online on February 22 of this year (cf. *RCTC* 2023, No. 2, p. 4), the research tool has now been supplemented with search functions for religious personnel from the other three state-recognized religions. According to the party's United Front Department, the official governing bodies of the three religions have posted the research tools online to “promote transparency in religious affairs.” A *South China Morning Post* comment saw the online databases as a further step in the Chinese authorities' effort to tighten their control over religious personnel.

The use of the lookup systems for religious personnel (教职人员信息查询系统) is explained in the United Front Department's report as follows: You first enter your cell phone number to receive an SMS verification code with which you can log into the system. Then you enter the search criteria – firstly the name given on the identity card of the person you are looking for or his/her religious name, and secondly his/her identity card number or the area where he/she is located – and start the search. “If the person queried is indeed a religious cleric recognized according to the law and on record,” the system displays information about that person, otherwise it reports that no information was found about that person (*Tongzhan xinyu* according to [www.xinde.org](http://www.xinde.org) May 23).

In February, the United Front Department's report said that the new research tool would uncover “fake” monks, suggesting that religious personnel not included in the lookup system might be scammers. In fact, it is likely that in many cases religious personnel not included in the reference systems are clergy who are legitimate from a religious point of view, but practice outside the state-recognized religious system, for example in unregistered house churches or in the Catholic underground.

The reference systems are accessible on the website of the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) and the websites of the national associations of the five religions. They can be opened on the websites of the Chinese Islamic Association ([www.chinainislam.net.cn](http://www.chinainislam.net.cn)), the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and Bishops' Conference ([www.chinacatholic.cn](http://www.chinacatholic.cn)) and the Chinese Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement ([www.ccctspm.org](http://www.ccctspm.org)), but registration (as far as is known) is only possible with cell phone number from Mainland China. The NRAA website and the reference systems on the websites of the Buddhist and Daoist governing bodies were not accessible from abroad. *kwt*

## Religious Studies

June 30, 2023:

### Well-known Chinese Vatican expert Prof. Ren Yanli has died

Prof. Ren, who died in a Beijing hospital at the age of 79, focused his studies on the history of Catholicism in the People's Republic of China and China-Holy See relations. In the next issue of *China heute* we will bring a detailed appraisal of Prof. Yanli's life and work (*Fides*, July 1). *kf*

## Daoism

May 26–27, 2023:

### “Daoist Church of Italy” celebrates 30th anniversary

The Chiesa Taoista d'Italia (意大利道教會), founded in 1993 and based in Caserta (Campania), celebrated its anniversary with an international congress in Naples and Caserta. A delegation came from the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA), led by Daoist priest Meng Zhiling, one of its vice presidents, with three other Daoists and an “adviser” (according to the CDA report) from the party's United Front Department. First, on the morning of May 26, at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy in Naples, a “Second Catholic-Daoist Seminar” was held on the theme “Communicating with the heart: interreligious dialogue as an instrument of peace and brotherhood in the world.” According to the CDA report, Meng Zhiling said that Daoism has always advocated dialogue between cultures and religions and that its concepts of respect for the Dao and the *de* (inner power), reverence for nature and harmonious coexistence could provide valuable guidance for interreligious exchange. Preparations for the Fifth World Daoist Forum and the World Daoist Federation are underway, Meng said. Prof. Francesco Asti, Vice Rector of the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy, expressed the expectation that this second meeting would further strengthen the friendship between Catholics and Daoists. Also speaking were Msgr. Gaetano Castello, Auxiliary Bishop of Naples, and the President of the Chiesa Taoista d'Italia, the Italian Daoist priest Vincenzo di Ieso (Li Xuanzong 李玄宗). The actual Daoist Congress then took place in Caserta in the Temple of Great Harmony. It ended with a “rite for the universal salvation of all beings,” led by Lee Zhiwang, the abbot of the Jade Emperor Temple in Singapore ([www.rubrics.it](http://www.rubrics.it) June 14; [www.taoist.org.cn](http://www.taoist.org.cn) June 2; program at [www.vitawebtv.it/caserta-26-27-maggio-2023-congresso-taoista-internazionale-a-caserta-delegazioni-di-europa-asia-e-oceania](http://www.vitawebtv.it/caserta-26-27-maggio-2023-congresso-taoista-internazionale-a-caserta-delegazioni-di-europa-asia-e-oceania)).

The Chiesa Taoista d'Italia had already organized a similar international Daoist congress with encounters at the Catholic faculty in Naples in June of 2019; see *RCTC* 2019, No. 3, p. 7. *kwt*

June 15, 2023:

### Graduation ceremony for eleven master's students at the Chinese Daoist Academy

The eleven graduates received their graduation certificates and master's certificates. Before that, they had to defend their master theses on June 4. According to the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) on its website, the defense commission consisted of 15 experts. 11 of them were scholars from state universities and academies, 4 were from the CDA and the Chinese Daoist Academy. The Chinese Daoist Academy (中国道教学院) is the national-level Daoist institute for religious education operated by the

CDA. According to its website, it also offers an undergraduate (bachelor's) course, but no graduation numbers have been announced for that. The graduation certificates and academic degrees awarded by institutes for religious education are valid within the religion; cf. also the state "Measures for the Administration of Institutes for Religious Education" (宗教院校管理办法, Chinese text at [www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2021/content\\_5623053.htm](http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2021/content_5623053.htm), German translation in *China heute* 2023, No. 2, pp. 92-104, and on [www.china-zentrum.de](http://www.china-zentrum.de) ([www.taoist.org.cn](http://www.taoist.org.cn) June 5, 16; [www.zgdjxy.org.cn](http://www.zgdjxy.org.cn) June 4). *kwt*

## Buddhism

June 12, 2023:

### Chinese Buddhist Academy graduation ceremony

At the ceremony at the Fayuan Temple in Beijing, graduates of the undergraduate (bachelor's) and postgraduate programs received their graduation certificates and degrees. The report on the website of the Chinese Buddhist Association, which runs the academy, does not give any figures, nor does it reveal information about the level of postgraduate degrees (master's or doctorate) ([www.chinabuddhism.com.cn](http://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn) June 12). The Chinese Buddhist Academy (中国佛教学院) is a national-level religious college. Graduation certificates and academic degrees awarded by institutes for religious education are valid within the religion. *kwt*

## Islam

May 19, 2023:

### Celebration of 70 years of the Chinese Islamic Association

The Chinese Islamic Association (CIA), the official, state-sanctioned governing body of Muslims in the People's Republic of China, celebrated its 70th anniversary at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Chen Ruifeng, vice minister of the CPC's United Front Department and director of the National Religious Affairs Administration, said in his speech that the founding of the CIA has achieved the great unity and integration of Muslims of all regions and ethnic groups in China. CIA President Yang Faming stated that over the past 70 years, the Islamic community in China has always been of the same mind and direction as the party. The CIA will unswervingly adhere to the leadership of the party, consciously forge a strong sense of community in the Chinese nation and promote the Sinicization of Islam in China, Yang said. Bishop Li Shan of Beijing congratulated the CIA on behalf of all religions ([www.chinaislam.net](http://www.chinaislam.net) May 22). *kwt*

May 27, 2023:

### Clashes between Hui Muslims and police over "Sinicization" of Najiyang Mosque, Yunnan

Numerous media reported on the clashes, which were also documented by videos and witness reports circulating on the Internet. According to the reports, on the morning of May 27, a construction crew arrived at the mosque in Najiyang. Najiyang, which is located in Nagu Town, Tonghai County in southwest China's Yunnan Province, is predominantly inhabited by Hui people. A group of locals tried

to break through the blockade of the several hundred strong police units shielding the construction crew. The police used pepper spray, residents threw water bottles and bricks. After several hours, the police retreated from the mosque. The next day, however, there were arrests and other measures taken by the authorities. According to *Bitter Winter*, it was announced on June 15 on behalf of the Najia-ying Mosque management committee that the reconstruction would start on June 16. It also brought the photo of a display board set up in Najiaying, showing the mosque after the planned renovation: with a temple-like structure instead of a dome and pagoda-like turrets instead of oriental minarets. In Shadian, 80 miles away, reconstruction of the local mosque is scheduled to begin at the end of June, according to Ruslan Yusupov in *The China Project*.

The anthropologist Yusupov, who conducted two years of field studies in Shadian, reported on the background: Najiaying and Shadian are two communities that have been inhabited almost exclusively by Hui for centuries and have a special meaning for Chinese Islam; the Islamic scholar and Quran translator Ma Jian (1906–1978) comes from Shadian. The Ming Dynasty Shadian Mosque was destroyed in 1975. At that time, an uprising against Mao's iconoclastic policies was put down by the military, and more than 1,400 residents were killed. In 1979, the "Shadian Incident" was officially redressed. In 2010, the current Shadian Mosque was built with space for 10,000 worshippers, a replica of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. Yusupov writes that Nagu with the Najiaying Mosque is a center for Islamic education. The mosque, built in 2004, holds 5,000 worshippers. According to Yusupov, the Arabic style of both mosques was approved by the authorities at the time. In recent years, thus Yusupov, thousands of mosques across China have been "sinicized," and the Najiaying and Shadian mosques are considered to be the last two government-approved "Arab"-style mosques in Yunnan, possibly in all of China, that have not yet been remodeled – the "end of an era" (*AsiaNews* May 30; *The China Project* May 30; *CNN* May 30; *www.bitterwinter.org* June 28; *New York Times* June 8; *Washington Post* May 29). *kwt*

June 17, 2023:

## Graduation ceremony for 98 graduates of the Chinese Islamic Quran Institute

98 students of the Chinese Islamic Quran Institute successfully completed their studies. They were graduates of the undergraduate (bachelor's) course, postgraduate master's course and undergraduate ahong (imam) course. It is not specified how the number of graduates was distributed among the various courses. At the ceremony, graduation certificates and certificates for the academic degrees obtained were presented (*www.chinaislam.net.cn* June 20). The Chinese Islamic Quran Institute (中国伊斯兰教经学院) is the national-level Islamic institute for religious education operated by the Chinese Islamic Association. Graduation certificates and academic degrees awarded by institutes for religious education are valid within the religion. *kwt*

June 26–30, 2023:

## Groups of Chinese pilgrims complete the Hajj for the first time since 2019 – and spread Chinese culture

On May 27, the first Chinese charter plane carrying 386 pilgrims from Ningxia landed in Saudi Arabia, where they were greeted by Chinese Consul-General in Jeddah, Wang Qimin. The Chinese Islamic Association (CIA), which is alone authorized by the Chinese state to organize Hajj for Chinese citizens, announced the arrival in the following days of more Muslim pilgrims from Yunnan, Beijing, Tianjin, Shaanxi, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Henan, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guizhou, Jiangxi, Hubei, Fujian, Inner

Mongolia, Tibet, Sichuan, Hunan and Qinghai. The CIA reports do not mention pilgrims from Xinjiang, although over 40% of the Muslims in the People's Republic of China are Uyghurs; in previous years pilgrims from Xinjiang had always been mentioned. The CIA sent a team of over 60 to look after the Hajjis in Saudi Arabia. On June 20, before the start of the actual Hajj (June 26–30), the Chinese Hajj team organized Chinese cultural performances for employees of two Saudi institutions who serve Chinese pilgrims, introducing them to Chinese language, calligraphy and tea art.

Unlike previous years, the CIA did not report the total number of Hajjis from the PRC this time. According to Chinese figures, more than 12,000 Muslims from the People's Republic took part in the Hajj in 2017. In 2022, according to the *Saudi Gazette*, the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah had set a quota of 9,190 people for pilgrims from China; at the time, however, China canceled the Hajj with reference to the pandemic. According to Saudi information, more than 1.84 million pilgrims took part in the Hajj in 2023, 63.5% of them came from Asian countries ([www.chinaislam.net.cn](http://www.chinaislam.net.cn) Sept. 22, 2017; May 28; June 2, 14, 22, 2023; [www.saudigazette.com.sa](http://www.saudigazette.com.sa) April 22, 2022; June 27, 2023). *kwt*

## Protestant Churches

April 14, 2023:

### Arrest in Yunnan for Covid masks with Bible sayings

On April 14, Chang Hao, a preacher at a small unregistered church in a rural area of Zhaotong City, Yunnan Province, was arrested. The three-day detention was extended several times, and on May 6 the lawyer and his wife were denied access to the prison and an interview with the detainee. The reason given for the arrest was that the masks, which were inscribed with Bible verses, would provoke and start arguments. Chang Hao had previously been summoned to the police several times ([www.ucanews.com](http://www.ucanews.com) May 1; [www.chinaaid.net/2023/05/blog-post\\_15.html](http://www.chinaaid.net/2023/05/blog-post_15.html)).

*Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

May 2023:

### Stiff prison sentence for selling Bibles?

Wang Honglan 王洪兰 is nearly 70 years old and her husband Ji Heying 季合营 is 73, both have been detained in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia since their arrest on April 14, 2021. The crime they are accused of, together with some relatives and Christian brothers and sisters, is the systematic resale of Bibles from the Chinese Christian Council for the equivalent of a good 5 million euros. The proceeds from the sale would not be for personal gain, but only for Christian activities. The indictment seeks prison terms of up to 15 years for Wang Honglan and her co-defendants for forming a criminal organization and collaborating with foreign forces. After a series of court hearings in January, March and May, the defense expressed hopes that the charges might be dropped due to flaws in the evidence ([www.bitterwinter.org](http://www.bitterwinter.org) May 16; [www.chinaaid.net/2023/05/10.html](http://www.chinaaid.net/2023/05/10.html)).

*Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

May 31, 2023:

## **Shaanxi Bible School studies the contents of the 20th CCP National Congress**

On the afternoon of May 31, Shaanxi Bible School held a mixed program of song, dance and a video viewing of the 20th Chinese Communist Party Congress (held in mid-October 2022). The national anthem and other patriotic songs were sung. Three students of the Bible school spoke about the folk musician Ma Ke, Doctor Luo Jinwen, who served in the medical brigade at the front in the anti-Japanese resistance war, and the Anglican bishop of Xi'an, Shen Zigao, presenting them as historical role models. Headmaster Wang Hong called on all teachers and students to actively study and implement the spirit of the 20th Chinese Communist Party Congress. The performances ended with a prayer for the fatherland ([www.bitterwinter.org](http://www.bitterwinter.org) June 7; [www.sxjdj.com.cn/xjr/5853.html](http://www.sxjdj.com.cn/xjr/5853.html)).

*Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

June 6-9, 2023:

## **Conference on "Theology of Gratitude" in Harbin**

From June 6 to 9, the director of Heilongjiang Theological Seminary, Dr. Lü Dezhi, invited national church leadership, academics, students and colleagues from other theological seminaries to come to Harbin for an exchange of content on the topic "Theology of Gratitude." The project was supported by the research department of Minzu University of China in Beijing. In total, more than 200 people attended the conference. The seminar saw itself as a contribution to Sinicization, which according to Pastor Kan Baoping is the most urgent task of the church in China. According to Dr. Lü a theology guided by basic socialist values and imbued with Chinese culture should be researched and further developed ([www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/16414](http://www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/16414)).

*Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

June 20, 2023:

## **166 degrees in theology granted by Nanjing Union Theological Seminary**

On June 20, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS) celebrated the graduation of 166 theology students, the largest number of graduates in the history of the seminary. 106 of 128 students of the four-year undergraduate course achieved the title of Bachelor, 36 of 38 graduates of the subsequent three-year Master's program the title of Master. Some of the students were not able to take part in all the exams due to a lack of English skills, for example, but still received their final certificate, albeit without a title. The academic title is not relevant for pastoral service in congregations and the church. The ceremony in the seminary church began with the singing of the national anthem. Pastor Shan Weixiang, vice president of the China Christian Council who works full-time in Shanghai, delivered the sermon, in which he compared post-graduation to the eruption of a butterfly larva from its cocoon. He encouraged the graduates to face the challenges of church and social life with a willingness to learn and to continue to grow ([www.njuts.cn](http://www.njuts.cn) June 23).

*Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

June 2023:

## Graduation ceremonies at various theological seminaries

A total of about 2,000 graduates received a certificate from a theological institution this year, said Pastor Wu Wei, president of the China Christian Council, at the graduation ceremony at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. In Shandong, 92 people received their graduation certificates on June 20. On June 21, Huadong Seminary in Shanghai awarded 22 bachelor's degrees in theology and 38 degrees in sacred music. On the same day, the graduation ceremony was celebrated in Fujian. The majority of the 152 graduates were lay people who had completed additional training in theology while working. 15 students from the Fujian Theological Seminary received the Bachelor's degree. A total of 84 people received a testimony from Guangdong Theological Seminary on June 29. In Inner Mongolia, 22 students completed a degree in theology or pastoral care.

In some places, patriotic education activities for prospective pastors were also held, such as a one-day seminar by the local Christian Council and the Three-Self Movement for the new graduates of the Dongbei Theological Seminary in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, or a week-long field trip by the graduating class of the Theological Seminary in Jiangxi under the motto: "Resuming the long march and beginning a new journey" (www.ccctspm.org June 26; July 4, 5 [several reports per day]; www.chinachristiandaily.com June 27).

*Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

July 6, 2023:

## Degree in Theology for the Deaf from Heilongjiang Provincial Theological Seminary

On July 6, the Theological Seminary presented the first graduating class of the newly developed four-year Theology for the Deaf course with a total of 12 graduates (4 of whom graduated from this year, 2023) their Bachelor's certificates. To date, a total of 51 people have completed this course. The teaching material had to be created entirely by the students themselves. A great need for deaf pastors in China is reflected in the many requests to the young theologians to come for visits and guest lectures. The celebration, in which the deaf showed their gratitude with gestures in a performance and asked all participants to complement the praise with their singing voices, was very moving (source: Lü Dezhi, President of Heilongjiang Theological Seminary).

*Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

## Catholic Church

April 14, 2023:

## Bishop Peter Lin Jiashan of Fuzhou has passed away

The bishop died at the age of 88 after an illness. As reported by *AsiaNews*, the bishop had been recognized by the Holy See as Bishop of Fuzhou (Fujian Province) since 2016 and officially took office in June 2020 with the approval of the Chinese government.

Lin Jiashan was born on September 2, 1934 in Changle district (Fujian) and was ordained a priest in May 1981. In the 1980s he was sentenced to ten years in a labor camp. On July 13, 1997, he was ordained bishop by underground Bishop Yang Shudao of Fuzhou and served as coadjutor bishop. In the official part of the Fuzhou Diocese, Joseph Zheng Changcheng had already been ordained bishop in 1991, he died in 2006.



According to some believers, thus *AsiaNews*, since the early 2000s he had the desire to make his situation official with the Chinese authorities, an intention that was, however, held back by the majority of his priests. The Diocese of Fuzhou is one of the dioceses with the largest number of Catholics in China. In 2020 it had about 300,000 faithful, 120 priests and over 500 nuns. According to *AsiaNews*, before Bishop Lin Jiashan's official installation three years ago, the priests were split into two groups: about 20 supported Bishop Lin, and another 60 supported Father Lin Yuntuan, who was appointed apostolic administrator of the archdiocese by the Holy See in 2013. In a 2019 letter to resolve disagreements between the underground priests and those who signed the government registration, Bishop Lin called on clergy and believers to be reconciled and avoid suspicion and attacks, *AsiaNews* said. Bishop Lin's funeral took place on April 17 (*AsiaNews* April 14; *Catholic Daily* April 14). *kf*

**April 25, 2023:**

### **Seven priests are ordained in five dioceses – significantly more priestly ordinations in the first half of 2023 than in the previous year**

On this day, priestly ordinations took place in five dioceses: three deacons were ordained priests in Jilin Diocese, and one each in the dioceses of Wanzhou, Beijing, Sanyuan and Tangshan ([www.xinde.org](http://www.xinde.org) April 25). Overall, in the course of the first half of 2023, the *Xinde* website reported the ordination of a total of 32 priests (my own count); certainly additional consecrations took place without being reported on the website. This is a significant increase compared to 2022 when only 15 priestly ordinations were counted in the whole year, the lowest number in decades (cf. "Statistical Update" in *RCTC* 2023, No. 2, pp. 25-40, here pp. 38-39). Presumably, consecrations that had to be postponed last year due to the corona pandemic will now also be made up for. *kwf*

**April 27, 2023:**

### **Shanghai: Memorial service for the 10th anniversary of Bishop Jin Luxian's death – celebrated by Bishop Shen Bin**

The report on the official website of the Chinese Bishops' Conference and Patriotic Association said that Bishop Shen Bin, along with more than 60 priests, over 70 sisters and nearly 1,000 parishioners, at Xujiahui Cathedral celebrated the memorial service for Shanghai Bishop Jin Luxian, who died 10 years ago. At the beginning of his homily, thus the report, Bishop Shen recalled Bishop Jin's extraordinary life and contribution to the building and development of the Church. Bishop Jin was not only an influential representative of the Catholic community in China, but also enjoyed a high reputation in religious circles, thus Bishop Shen. He reportedly also said that Bishop Jin loved the country and the Church and advocated the policy of independence and self-government of the Church; he had made important contributions to the development of Catholicism in China and assisted the Party and the government in implementing the policy of freedom of belief. Recognizing Bishop Jin Luxian's great contribution to the establishment and development of the diocese of Shanghai, Bishop Shen called on the clergy and faithful of the diocese of Shanghai to share Bishop Jin's trust in God, his love for his country and his love for the Church, and to learn his spirit of unity and solidarity ([www.chinacatholic.cn](http://www.chinacatholic.cn) April 29). *kf*

May 2023:

## Shanghai: Marian pilgrimage to Sheshan allowed once again

This year in May, pilgrimages to the Sheshan near Shanghai, where the Mother of God is revered as Mary Help of Christians, were permitted once again – but under certain conditions. The Diocese of Shanghai reported on its website that the diocesan pilgrimage took place on May 17. Almost 1,000 people – priests, sisters, seminarians, diocesan workers and faithful – took part. “The Mass [in the basilica] was presided over by Bishop Shen Bin of the Diocese of Shanghai, and about 50 priests concelebrated,” the report said. Bishop Shen was installed by the Chinese authorities on April 4 as the new bishop of Shanghai. In his sermon, the bishop emphasized, in addition to his appeal to trust in God and love one’s neighbor, that the flag of patriotism and love for the Church must be held high. He also mentioned the importance of the work of pastoral evangelization.

A diocesan circular on the pilgrimages to Mount Sheshan, published April 29 on the diocesan website, states that pilgrim groups and individual pilgrims must register online. Priests bringing groups from other dioceses to the Sheshan must identify themselves as Catholic religious personnel and provide confirmation from their diocese. They must also fill out in advance and submit with documentation a form from the Shanghai Religious Affairs Bureau for the reporting of inter-provincial religious activities for the record. All pilgrims have their identity card scanned at the entrance, according to the circular ([www.catholicsh.org](http://www.catholicsh.org) May 17; photo of the circular at [www.catholicsh.org/NewListIn.aspx?InfoID=15631&InfoCategoryID=18](http://www.catholicsh.org/NewListIn.aspx?InfoID=15631&InfoCategoryID=18)). *kf*

May 5, 2023:

## Wenzhou and Hangzhou Catholic groups for the deaf meet in “groundbreaking” first exchange

Pastoral care for the deaf in China’s Catholic communities is still underdeveloped, according to the report on the Catholic portal *Xinde*. It is all the more remarkable that there are two Catholic deaf groups in Zhejiang province – the Effata deaf group at Hangzhou Cathedral and the Ignatius deaf group at Wenzhou Cathedral. The report described their first meeting as “groundbreaking.” The Ignatius group from Wenzhou went to Hangzhou together with a priest and other members of the cathedral community. There both deaf groups introduced themselves to each other. During the exchange, six deaf people shared in sign language about their faith experience that their quiet world is also full of joy and that everyone is a beloved child of God. They stressed that it is important to care for others, such as by visiting the sick. Deaf parishioners from Hangzhou said that if the Church needs them, they will help with any work, no matter how tedious, because everyone, regardless of their position, has a responsibility for the Church – all are its members. The meeting was attended by a priest and a Sister from Hangzhou Cathedral and a sign language interpreter. The next day, both deaf groups went on a joint pilgrimage to Shanghai ([www.xinde.org](http://www.xinde.org) May 8). *kf*

May 8, 2023:

## AsiaNews: Xuanhua Vicar General still in detention after two years

Vicar General Simon Zhang Jianlin of Xuanhua Diocese in Hebei Province remains in detention after two years, *AsiaNews* reported on May 8. The condition of his 90-year-old sick mother is said to have deteriorated in the meantime. The family hopes for a gesture of humanity from the authorities. The

bishop of the diocese is underground bishop Augustinus Cui Tai, who time and again has been illegally detained for 16 years and has also been in prison since April 2021, and nothing has been heard of his whereabouts since then.

Vicar General Zhang, the report said, was arrested after he criticized priestly and diaconal ordinations made by Bishop Guo Jincai of Chengde on May 11, 2021 in Qujiazhuang within the Diocese of Xuanhua for the Diocese of Zhangjiakou performed without the consent of those in charge of the dioceses of Xuanhua and Xiwanzi. Zhang had warned the diocese's priests not to participate in "illegal ordinations." Zhangjiakou is the official diocese that includes the two Vatican-recognized dioceses of Xuanhua and Xiwanzi. Some competitions of the 2022 Winter Olympics took place in Zhangjiakou (*AsiaNews* May 8; see also *RCTC* 2023, No. 2, pp. 11-12). *kf*

**May 9–10, 2023:**

### **Seventh Forum on Sinicized Catholic Theology in Ningbo on the role of Bible interpretation and research**

The high-level forum with around 200 participants was organized by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and Bishops' Conference together with the local Catholic bodies and the Diocese of Ningbo. The topic was the importance of Bible interpretation and research for the Sinicization of the Church. At the opening political representatives, including heads of relevant departments of the party's Central United Front Department, spoke on the subject of Sinicization. Bishop Li Shan, Chairman of the CCPA, said in his opening speech that in order to adhere to Sinicization, Catholicism must adhere to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as its guiding thought, to the principle of the Church's independence and democratic administration, and to the building of a theological system of thought corresponding to the country's conditions.

The substantive part of the forum began with a dialogue on the interpretation and study of religious scriptures. Religious scholar Zhuo Xinping, vice chairman of the official associations of all five religions and Liu Jinguang, editor-in-chief of the *Zhongguo zongjiao* magazine of the National Religious Affairs Administration, took part. This was followed by a seminar on Bible study and the Sinicization of Catholicism. The report on the website of the Catholic governing bodies does not contain any information about the topics and content of the more than 30 lectures given by experts from academies, universities and theological seminaries. In the last part of the forum, "Sermons on the Sinicization of Catholicism," ten priests presented sermons on the subject of thrift. According to the report, the ten priests implemented the "Joint Appeal to Promote Frugality and Refrain from Extravagance" passed by the Joint Conference of National Religious Organizations (June 8, 2022) by exhorting priests and believers to live a simple life in the image of Jesus.

On May 9, a "Base for Implementing Democratic Church Management" was opened in Ningbo. The newly erected, two-story exhibition building of more than 600 m<sup>2</sup> shows the "historical context of the Sinicization of Catholicism in Zhejiang and the achievements of the democratic administration of the Church," using more than 80 panels, 230 pictures as well as multimedia and digital displays ([www.chinacatholic.cn](http://www.chinacatholic.cn) May 10; [www.mzw.zj.gov.cn](http://www.mzw.zj.gov.cn) May 15, also in [www.xinde.org](http://www.xinde.org) May 16). *kwt*

**May 11, 2013:**

### **South Church, Beijing: memorial service on the 413th anniversary of Matteo Ricci's death**

"On May 11, 1610, Father Matteo Ricci died in Xuanwumen Church [South Church]. To commemorate the 413th anniversary of the death of its first pastor, Father Matteo Ricci, the parish held a memo-

rial event.” This is how a report on the Catholic portal *Xinde* presents the event. Five priests participated in the Holy Mass in memory of the Jesuit missionary to China. One of them served as organist. After the Mass, priests and faithful prayed in front of the statue of Matteo Ricci for the beatification of the “Venerable” father. On May 14 there was also a lecture on the topic “Matteo Ricci in the midst of life” ([www.xinde.org](http://www.xinde.org) May 17).

The Xuanwumen Church of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is the oldest Catholic church in Beijing. A small church was first built there in 1605 by Ricci. The current building dates from 1904. On December 17, 2022, Pope Francis recognized Ricci’s heroic degree of virtue, a precursor to a later beatification, and thus giving Ricci the title of “Venerable Servant of God” (cf. *China heute* 2023, No. 1, p. 12 [in German]). Since then there have been a number of “Ricci activities,” such as a prayer time in honor of Ricci during the visit to Beijing of Hong Kong’s Bishop Chow (see the entry of April 17–21, 2023 in the “Hong Kong” section), the installation of the statues of Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi in Ricci’s birthplace Macerata (see the entry of May 9, 2023 in the “China – Europe” section) as well as Pope Francis’ catechesis on Ricci (see the entry of May 31, 2023 in the section “Sino-Vatican Relations”). *kwt*

June 30, 2023:

## ***Xinde* reports on the number of graduate degrees at the Catholic theological seminaries in China**

According to the Shijiazhuang-based Catholic newspaper *Xinde (Faith)*, this year 37 candidates for the priesthood have graduated from five Catholic theological-philosophical (major) seminaries: 13 from the National Seminary in Beijing, 12 from the Hebei Seminary in Shijiazhuang, 7 from the Seminary in Jilin, 3 from Shaanxi Seminary in Xi’an and 2 from the Sichuan Seminary in Chengdu. Another three Catholic seminaries – the Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai, the Diocesan Seminary of Beijing, and the Central and South China Seminary in Wuchang – have no graduates this year, according to *Xinde*. In addition, at the National Seminary, which had its graduation ceremony on June 28, 10 people received a master’s degree and 30 religious Sisters graduated. At the Shijiazhuang Seminary, 13 Sisters and 4 lay Catholics graduated; 5 Sisters graduated from the seminary in Xi’an and 3 Sisters in Jilin. At the Shenyang seminary, which has stopped training candidates for the priesthood for some time, this year 41 lay people completed a two-year course for catechists (教理讲员). It is not stated what qualifications the Sisters and laypeople named in *Xinde*’s statistics obtained. According to the report in *Xinde*, in addition, at all seminaries Sisters and lay people are increasingly being systematically trained in theology and philosophy; this is good for the future development of the church, the report said.

According to the 2023 Regulations for Admissions available on the National Seminary’s website, candidates for the priesthood, unless they have previously studied at a minor seminary for at least two years, must first complete a one-year preparatory spiritual year. This is followed by the undergraduate (*benke*) course. After six years – two years of philosophy, four years of theology – graduates earn a bachelor’s degree. Priests or candidates for the priesthood who have completed the undergraduate course in theology or religious Sisters with at least three years of systematic theology studies are admitted to the three-year master’s course of the National Seminary. – All graduation certificates and academic degrees awarded by institutes for religious education are valid within the religion. *kwt*

## Sino-Vatican Relations

April 4 / July 15, 2023:

### Bishop Shen Bin of Haimen is installed as Ordinary of Shanghai – Papal appointment follows

On April 4, 2023, Joseph Shen Bin, Bishop of Haimen, was installed as Ordinary of the Diocese of Shanghai by appointment of the official Chinese Bishops' Conference. Only on July 15 did Pope Francis subsequently appoint him Bishop of Shanghai. The diocese of Shanghai has not had an active bishop since the death of the coadjutor bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, who headed the official part of the diocese, in 2013, and the death of the underground diocesan bishop Fan Zhongliang in 2014, since the intended successor, auxiliary bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, is not allowed to exercise his office. Shen Bin (b. 1970) was ordained Bishop of Haimen in 2010 with the approval of the Pope and the Chinese authorities. Since 2022 he has been chairman of the official Chinese Bishops' Conference, which Rome does not recognize. For details, reactions and background see *China heute* 2023, No. 2, pp. 71-73 (in German).

kwt

May 13, 2023:

### Rome: Book on Papal Magisterium published in Chinese

On May 13, a volume of commentaries in Chinese on the Magisterium of Pope Francis was presented at the Roman headquarters of the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*. Its title is: "The magisterium of Pope Francis. A guide to reading his Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations" (教宗方济各牧职训导—宗座通谕及劝谕阅读指南). The work by Jesuit Father Antonio Spadaro, director of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, is the result of a workshop on the three Encyclicals and five Apostolic Exhortations published by Pope Francis during the first ten years of his pontificate.

In a press release from *La Civiltà Cattolica* published on the Vatican website, Father Spadaro is quoted as saying: "It seems important to me to offer Chinese-speaking readers a sort of guide to reading these important texts for a deeper understanding of their message. The readers we hope to reach, in a special way, are the pastors of the People of God, priests and bishops, and also catechists and those in the Christian community who have the task of guidance." Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, Pro-Prefect of the Section for the First Evangelization and New Particular Churches of the Dicastery for Evangelization, gave a lengthy speech at the presentation in which he discussed the themes of Chinese Catholics and the papal magisterium; Pope Francis and China; the Magisterium of Pope Francis and the paths taken by Chinese Catholicism; and "In the footsteps of Matteo Ricci" and explained the importance of papal encyclicals and writings. The book can be downloaded free of charge from the Chinese edition of the journal (公教文明), established in 2020 at [www.gjwm.org/2023/05/13/il-magistero-di-papa-francesco/](http://www.gjwm.org/2023/05/13/il-magistero-di-papa-francesco/) (*Fides* May 14; *Sunday Examiner* May 19; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/info/2023/05/03/press-release-la-civiltà-cattolica--presentation-of-the-book-in.html>). kf

May 18, 2023:

### Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-fai SDB appointed Apostolic Nuncio to Libya

"The Holy Father has appointed Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai, titular of Sila and apostolic nuncio in Malta, as apostolic nuncio in Libya," the Vatican Press Office said on May 18. Hon was born in Hong

Kong in 1950 and made his vows in 1975 in the Chinese Province of the Salesians of Don Bosco. The province includes Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and Mainland China. He was ordained a priest in 1982. After working as a professor of theology at Holy Spirit Seminary College in Hong Kong, he became secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in 2010 and was ordained bishop in 2011. In 2017, Hon Tai-Fai was appointed Apostolic Nuncio to Greece, his first post in the diplomatic service. This transfer was widely seen as a distancing from the Archbishop's critical stance on the Vatican's rapprochement with China. Libya has no dioceses, only the three apostolic administrations of Tripoli, Benghazi and Derna and the apostolic prefecture of Misrata ([aleteia.org May 22; https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/05/18/0373/00817.html](https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/05/18/0373/00817.html)). *kf*

**May 24, 2023:**

## **Pope Francis speaks on World Day of Prayer for the Church in China**

At the general audience in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis said: "Today is World Day of Prayer for the Catholic Church in China. It coincides with the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, venerated and invoked at the Shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan in Shanghai. On this occasion, I wish to offer an assurance of my remembrance and express my closeness to our brothers and sisters in China, sharing in their joys and hopes. I turn my thoughts especially to all those who suffer, pastors and faithful, that in the communion and solidarity of the universal Church they may experience consolation and encouragement. I invite everyone to raise their prayers to God, that the Good News of Christ crucified and risen may be proclaimed in its fullness, beauty, and freedom, bearing fruit for the good of the Catholic Church and all of Chinese society" ([www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/audiences/2023/documents/20230524-udienza-generale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/audiences/2023/documents/20230524-udienza-generale.html)). *kf*

**May 31, 2023:**

## **Pope Francis pays tribute to Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci**

On May 31, Pope Francis continued his series of catechesis during the Wednesday audience in St. Peter's Square. This time he chose the China missionary and Jesuit Fr. Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) as an example of a great evangelizer. The text of his catechesis can be found at [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2023/documents/20230531-udienza-generale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2023/documents/20230531-udienza-generale.html). *kf*

**June 5, 2023:**

## **Professor Bai Tongdong of Fudan University in Shanghai appointed a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences**

As the Vatican announced on June 5, "the Chinese philosopher and political scientist Tongdong Bai" was appointed as a new member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in the Vatican. The 53-year-old studied in Boston and took up his first professorship in the USA. According to *Vatican News*, he is currently a professor at Fudan University in Shanghai [Faculty of Philosophy], New York University School of Law and New York University Shanghai. He is particularly interested in traditional Chinese political philosophy" (*Vatican News* June 5). *kf*

## Hong Kong

March 25, 2023:

### Bishop Chow's Easter Message: May Hong Kong Prisoners See the Light

In his Easter message, written on March 25, Bishop Stephen Chow Sau Yan SJ of Hong Kong recalled, among other things, the 6,000 people arrested in 2019 in connection with the “violent outbreaks” who are still awaiting their court decisions. According to the bishop, “waiting endlessly will not help them or our society to move toward healing.” However, “it is through compassion and leniency on lighter offences that can give hope and positive energy to our wounded community.” In his message, Bishop Chow also reminds those who have felt the weight of the serious economic crisis and still need assistance: “These individuals should not be perceived as burdens of society.” The Bishop also addresses the many people who have already left Hong Kong or have decided to do so: “While we wish them all the best, their departure has created noticeable voids in different layers of our social fabric that are not easy to fill.” But God would not abandon us “who call upon Him sincerely, seeking for a fairer and freer homeland for everyone dwelling in it.” “Caring for the elderly, especially those “left behind” or living alone must be a priority,” the bishop also wrote (<https://catholic.org.hk/en/Easter-Message-2023/>). *kf*

April 17-21, 2023:

### Hong Kong's Bishop Stephen Chow visits Beijing

Bishop Chow Sau Yan SJ visited the capital for five days at the invitation of Bishop Joseph Li Shan of the Diocese of Beijing. Bishop Chow was accompanied by Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing OFM, Vicar General Fr. Peter Choy Wai-man as well as his personal secretary, the layman Wong Ka-chun. The visit began in the North Church of Beijing, the seat of the bishopric, with a joint hour of prayer, including among other things, prayers in honor of the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). The delegation also visited Matteo Ricci's tomb and the national and diocesan seminaries in Beijing. Holy Masses were also celebrated in the South Church and the East Church. The delegation also paid a visit to the official bodies of the Catholic Church in China, the official Bishops' Conference (not recognized by the Vatican) and the Patriotic Association, and met with government officials. Bishop Chow also met other Chinese bishops: Bishop Shen Bin, who recently moved from Haimen to the bishopric of Shanghai and holds the office of chairman of the Bishops' Conference, Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yan'an as well as Bishop Guo Jincai (*AsiaNews* April 18; May 6; *Fides* April 17; *Sunday Examiner* April 28; *The Pillar* April 18; *Vatican News* April 17, April 21; [www.catholic.org.hk/en/media-09032023](http://www.catholic.org.hk/en/media-09032023); [www.xinde.org/show/53653](http://www.xinde.org/show/53653); see also *China heute* 2023, No. 2, pp. 73-75 [in German]). *kf*

May 18-19, 2023:

### Mainland China and Hong Kong church leaders at joint seminar on Sinicization

On May 18 and 19, a conference with 120 participants took place in the Hong Kong YMCA Hotel at the invitation of the Hong Kong Liaison Office. The event was organized equally by representatives of local Protestant churches and institutions and delegates from the Mainland. Pastor Wong Ka Fa, Chairman of the Hong Kong Christian Council, and Pastor Wu Wei, President of the China Christian Council,

delivered the opening addresses, both of which stressed the importance of contextualizing Christianity in order to take root in China and become an integral part of the culture. Anglican Archbishop of Hong Kong Andrew Chan said a prayer of blessing. The keynote speeches were by Milton Wan Wai-yiu, Prof. em. from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Pastor Xu Xiaohong, Chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Both emphasized the importance of Sinicization in the current historical situation, Prof. Wan with a focus on Chinese core values, Pastor Xu in the context of socialist society. Along with the national leaders of the Christian Council and the Three-Self movement, Mainland China professors Zhang Zhigang and Xu Yihua attended the conference and gave lectures. From Nanjing Theological Seminary, Dr. Chen Yilu, Dr. Wen Ge and Dr. Lin Manhong were part of the 24-person delegation. In addition to the keynote speeches, 14 contributions on various topics were presented. The only lecture given by a foreign person was given by Prof. Philip Wickeri. In the closing remarks, Gu Mengfei, general secretary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee, spoke of the first symposium of this kind in history. It strengthened the fellowship of the churches in both places, he said. Both strove for a healthy growth of the churches under the motto “one country, two systems” ([www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/16333](http://www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/16333); [www.chinachristiandaily.com](http://www.chinachristiandaily.com) May 23).

*Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

**June 4, 2023:**

## **Hong Kong: Commemorative events for the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre are still banned**

The annual commemoration events to commemorate the victims of the 1989 crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in Beijing, which have taken place since 1990, this year again have been banned. Since 2020, the vigil in Victoria Park has been considered illegal, first under the pretext of the pandemic, then due to the implementation of the National Security Law, which was introduced on July 1, 2020. In 2021, memorial services were still held in seven Catholic churches. This year this was no longer the case. The Diocese prayed for the Church in China on May 24, the day which Pope Benedict XVI had introduced as the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China. As Gianni Criveller writes in *AsiaNews*, the diocese, through Br. Thomas Law, responsible for liturgical life, invited the faithful on June 4 “to live inwardly,” “remembering what they wish to remember.” Meanwhile, the diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, which helped prepare the ecumenical prayer vigils, has significantly reduced its goals and even changed its name. “Perhaps as a protective precaution,” writes Criveller. The commission was founded in 1977 and has been called the Diocesan Commission for Integral Human Development since the end of 2022.

The Secretary for Security (i.e. Home Secretary) Chris Tang had threatened severe repression against those who use June 4 to “commit ‘acts that endanger national security,’” according to Criveller. Interestingly, pro-Beijing associations had been granted permission to hold a kind of fun fair in Victoria Park from June 3-5 to celebrate the upcoming 26th anniversary of Hong Kong’s handover from Britain to China. Interrogations and some arrests took place around the park on June 4. For example, a man who was sitting on a bench with a candle in his hand was escorted into a police car, as was a woman holding flowers in her hand (*AFP/LICAS* June 5; *AsiaNews* [section “Red Lanterns”] June 1; *Sunday Examiner* October 14, 2022). *kf*



## China – Europe

May 9, 2023:

### Statues of Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi from China have been blessed at the Cathedral in Macerata

On May 9, Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin blessed two life-size marble statues of the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and his first and most important disciple, the Chinese Catholic and scholar-official Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), during a Mass in Macerata. The two statues now decorate the facade of the Cathedral of San Giovanni. They were donated by Catholic communities in Beijing and Shanghai and made by a workshop in Quyang, Hebei Province, under the guidance of Catholic sculptor Su Jianqiao. With their prominent position, they are intended to demonstrate the special bond between the Catholic Church in China and Macerata and, above all, its famous son Matteo Ricci. For more details see the report in *China heute* 2023, No. 2, pp. 75-76 (in German).

*Dirk Kuhlmann*

May 29 to June 11, 2023:

### Amity Foundation visits Europe

A high-level delegation from the Amity Foundation (Aide jijinhui 爱德基金会) visited Western Europe and met a number of partners and organizations there. Their journey took them to Finland, Geneva, Berlin and Nuremberg. Participants were Chairman Qiu Zhonghui, General Secretary Ms. Ling Chunxiang, Deputy General Secretary Ms. She Hongyu, Head of the Hong Kong Office Anthony Tong, Representative of Beijing and Geneva Offices Ms. Qian Xiaofeng and Pastor Ms. Kou Weiwei. It was the Amity leadership's first trip abroad after a four-year hiatus due to the coronavirus pandemic. For details see the report in *China* 2023, No. 2, pp. 76-77 (in German).

*Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

### Authors' Abbreviations:

Katharina Feith (*kf*)

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber (*kwt*)

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