

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

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

Religious Studies

November 18/19, 2023:

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

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

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

Religious Policy

November 8, 2023:

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

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

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

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

Daoism

November 24–28, 2023:

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

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

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

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

Buddhism

November 4, 2023:

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

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

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

November 9–10, 2023:

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

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

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

November 10, 2023:

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

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

November 26, 2023:

Sixth Tone: Wenshu Monastery in Chengdu promotes vegetarianism for visitors

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

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

December 4, 2023:

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

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

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

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

Islam

November 22, 2023:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Protestant Churches

October 13–18, 2023:

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

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

October 25, 2023:

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

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

October 30 / November 22, 2023:

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

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

November 4, 2023:

Pastor Wu Wei meets representatives of the Russian Evangelical Alliance

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

November 22, 2023:

Preacher Chang Hao remains in custody

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

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

Catholic Church

October 25, 2023:

Book with testimonies of Chinese LGBTQ Catholics presented to Pope Francis

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

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

October 28, 2023:

Dating event for single young Catholics in Hangzhou

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

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

November 6–15, 2023:

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

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

November 7–8, 2023:

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

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

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

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

November 16, 2023:

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

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

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

November 26, 2023:

83 adult catechumens are baptized and confirmed in Shanghai Cathedral

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

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

Sino-Vatican Relations

November 13/14, 2023:

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

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

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

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

Hong Kong

July/October 2023:

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

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

November 4, 2023:

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

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

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

November 9, 2023:

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

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

November 13–15, 2023:

Beijing Bishop Li Shan visits Hong Kong

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

November 13–17, 2023:

Third International Conference for Chinese Permanent Deacons in Hong Kong

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

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

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

November 15–16, 2023:

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

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

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

Taiwan

September 23, 2023:

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

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

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This "News Update" was first published in *China heute* 2023, No. 4, pp. 215-223 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the "News Update" refer to the year 2023.