

News Update on Religion and Church in China June 21 – October 27, 2024

Compiled by Katharina Feith, Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle) and
Katharina Wenzel-Teuber
Translated by David Streit SVD

The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2024, No. 3, pp. 4-24) covered the period April 8 – June 29, 2024.

General

September 2024:

New course on marriage issues begins

As reported by state broadcaster CCTV, according to the online magazine *Sixth Tone* published by the Shanghai United Media Group, the Vocational University of Civil Affairs in Beijing will begin its first marriage-related course in September. The new course, “Marriage Services and Management,” is a response to the government’s efforts to “construct harmonious families.” The new university is directly under the Ministry of Civil Affairs. “According to the university, the course won’t solely focus on wedding planning and matchmaking, but train students to provide services ‘across the entire marriage cycle,’” said *Sixth Tone*. “The program, set to enroll 70 undergraduate students from 12 provinces in 2024, is focusing on the marriage industry to cultivate students with comprehensive abilities,” Zhao Honggang, the university’s vice president, told CCTV. Academic subjects, which make up 45% of the curriculum, include management, sociology, family culture, ethics and economics. The remaining 55% goes to practical training in the areas of family counseling, wedding planning and matchmaking services. In addition, there are aspects such as premarital counseling and pre-divorce counseling, as well as internships in registry offices and matchmaking agencies. Students would also, for example, participate in wedding ceremonies on campus. After graduation, they would have the opportunity to work at matchmaking agencies, wedding service providers and marriage and family counseling organizations. The marriage rate has fallen sharply in recent years, according to the report, with the exception of 2023 after the end of the Covid pandemic. At the same time, it is estimated that the Chinese online dating and matchmaking market almost tripled between 2014 and 2023. In addition to the marriage services and management program, the university also offers the first degree program in Modern Funeral Management in China. More than 100 students will start this course in September (*Sixth Tone* July 30). *kf*

September 13, 2024:

China passes draft law to increase retirement age

From January 2025, China will gradually increase the retirement age. Within 15 years, the retirement age for women will be increased from the current 50 to 55 years to 55 to 58 years and for men from the current 55 to 60 years to 63 years. This is the first adjustment since 1955, although the average life expectancy has doubled since then and is now just under 80 years, according to the *NZZ*. Pensions can be drawn if you have paid social security contributions for at least 15 years. However, pension payments are low and the differences between urban and rural areas are large. Migrant workers in particular fare poorly because they usually pay very little. The Chinese government hesitated for a long time before taking this step because resistance was repeatedly spreading among the population. However, it was necessary due to China's aging population and low birth rate. According to the *NZZ* report, pension insurance accounts for five percent of gross domestic product. According to a calculation by the state-funded Academy of Sciences in Beijing, the country is at risk of bankruptcy by 2035. 300 million Chinese would retire in the next decade. The declining proportion of the working-age population is putting pressure on the economy. At the same time, the potential for frustration among younger people could increase. Unemployment is high and competition on the job market is fierce. "However, it is unlikely that young people will take to the streets because of this. A kind of fatalism has taken hold among them," says the report (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung NZZ* Sep. 13). *kf*

Religious Policy

June 26, 2024:

High-level meeting: Sinicization is the only way to adapt religions to socialist society

Speakers at the meeting in Beijing on "Advancing the Sinicization of Our Country's Religions in Depth" were Shi Taifeng, head of the Central United Front Department of the Party and member of the Politburo, and eight other representatives of central party organs and state ministries. Cadres from the United Front departments and religious authorities at the provincial level, as well as representatives of academia also attended the meeting. According to a report on the United Front website, Shi Taifeng stated: "Adhering to the orientation of our country's religions toward Sinicization is the only viable way to actively guide religions to adapt to socialist society." – According to Shi Taifeng's definition, Sinicization clearly has a sociopolitical (not cultural) meaning. This was also reflected in his further statements, as far as they can be taken from the report (*Tongzhan xinyu* according to www.sara.gov.cn June 28). *kwt*

October 1, 2024:

75 years of the People's Republic of China

All five religions were encouraged to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the state. There are many photos on the Internet showing the ceremonial raising of the national flag in front of religious buildings, congratulatory banners or prayer events for the fatherland. Some examples from the Catholic Church in Hebei Province can be seen here: www.xinde.org/show/55703. *kwt*

Daoism

August 3, 2024:

Comrade Li Wencheng, former Secretary General of the Chinese Daoist Association, dies at the age of 97

The party man described his path to the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) and his contribution to the resumption of the ordination of Quanzhen priests in 1989 in an interview conducted in 2021. Li Wencheng 李文成 was born in Gaoyang, Shanxi Province, in 1927. He joined the CCP in 1946. After 1949, he worked in local propaganda departments of the CCP and for a newspaper. In 1952, he came to Beijing and was selected to work in the Department of Religious Affairs of the Cultural and Educational Commission of the State Council, later the Bureau of Religious Affairs. There, he was trained in religion and religious policy for six months. He then took part – as he said in an interview – in a “study class” for Catholic religious clergy in the North Church of Beijing, in which over 100 priests and bishops mainly studied patriotism and anti-imperialism.

According to the CDA's obituary, he started to work as office director in the CDA as early as 1958. There is no information about the following decades. When Li was preparing for retirement at the age of almost 60, he was transferred (again?) to the CDA in 1986 as its general secretary, a position he held until 1999. There, according to his own statements, his task was to “implement the party's religious policy since the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee [in 1982],” which mainly involved the restoration of Daoist religious activities, the reopening of Daoist sites, the founding of the Chinese Daoist Academy and the CDA magazine *Zhongguo daojiao*. Of particular importance was the first ordination of priests of the Quanzhen tradition of Daoism since the 1940s, which took place in the Baiyun Temple in Beijing in 1989. In the interview, Li Wencheng describes how difficult it was to find old priests in China who could reconstruct the ordination ritual after such a long time.

As Stephen Jones commented in his Daoism blog, Li himself was certainly not religious, but “a typical example of the bureaucrats the CCP selects for the five authorised religions. Many of them do not believe in God or religion. They are there just to control religion on behalf of the Party” (www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=10112&p='p' [Interview]; www.taoist.org.cn Aug. 3 [Obituary]; <https://stephenjones.blog/category/li-family/> Sept. 3). *kwt*

October 12, 2024:

World Federation of Daoism receives a visit from the Green Climate Fund

Malfada Duarte, the executive director of the Green Climate Fund, visited the World Federation of Daoism (WFD, 世界道教联合会) at its headquarters in the Baiyun Temple in Beijing. There she met, among others, the Daoist priest Meng Zhiling, Secretary General of the WFD and Vice Chairman of the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA), other representatives of the WFD and CDA, and the Daoist priest Wang Shiqing from the Youth Committee of the Chinese Committee on Religion and Peace. It is the first time since its founding that the World Federation of Daoism has interacted with an international organization, according to the report on the CDA website. Both sides discussed possible areas for cooperation and put forward proposals for cooperation in the areas of environmental protection, clean energy, sustainable development and the Belt and Road Initiative, the report said. It further says that the WFD will strengthen its relations with the Green Climate Fund, declaring that they want to jointly look for ways to combine the ecological wisdom of Daoism with the goals of the climate fund (www.taoist.org.cn Oct. 22).

The Green Climate Fund was created by the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The WFD was founded in 2023 at the 5th International Daoism Forum and has 52 Daoist organizations from 20 countries as members. The chairman of the CDA, Li Guangfu, is also chairman of the WFD. *kwt*

Buddhism

July 3–5, 2024:

“2024 Buddhist English Training Course” in Zhuhai

80 participants from all over China came to the course at the Putuo Temple in Zhuhai in Guangdong Province, not far from Macau. The course was organized by the official umbrella organization of Buddhism in China, the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA). The Putuo Temple is home to the “English Base for Buddhist Exchange” (佛教英语交流基地), approved in 2017 by the National Administration for Religious Affairs and the CBA.

As Dharma Master Mingsheng explained in a speech at the “Buddhist English Training Course” in 2021, the Base trains bilingual and multilingual elites who are used at the World Buddhist Forums and other international Buddhist conferences. In addition to English, working languages are also Japanese, German, Korean, Russian, Thai, Pali and Sanskrit. “With full confidence in Chinese culture, we are making Chinese Buddhism global,” said Mingsheng in 2021, while stressing also the adherence to the path of Sinicization. Another goal of the Base is “telling the story of Chinese Buddhism well,” this is the duty of the bilingually trained monks. The Base has translated numerous Buddhist scriptures and is helping to produce *The Voice of Dharma*, the new English edition of the CBA magazine *Fayin* 法音, Mingsheng said. He is the chairman of the Guangdong Buddhist Association (www.chinabuddhism.com.cn July 5; www.xinchanfeng.com/1-1/16301.html Sept. 26, 2021). *kwt*

July 6, 2024:

The 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso turns 89

At the time of his birthday, the Dalai Lama was in the USA for knee surgery on June 28. In a video message on July 5, he said that “except for the issues with my knee, I am basically in good health.” He thanked everyone and asked for their prayers. On August 28, he arrived back in Dharamsala – after a stopover in Zurich (see below).

A Tibetan author living in New York named Ugyen Gyalpo wrote in *Bitter Winter* that despite His Holiness’s assurances that he would live up to the age of 113, the vulnerability of the Tibetan people without him is undeniable. The Chinese government, with its “long wait game,” seeks to exploit this vulnerability. To counteract this, Tibetans should urge the Dalai Lama to consider self-emanation during his lifetime, said Ugyen Gyalpo. – In the statement on the question of his reincarnation from 2011, the Dalai Lama had pointed out the possibility of emanation during his lifetime (<https://bitterwinter.org> Sept. 27; www.buddhistdoor.net Aug. 7.; www.dalailama.com Aug. 28; www.dalailama.com/the-dalai-lama/biography-and-daily-life/reincarnation [Declaration of the Dalai Lama from 2011]). *kwt*

Approx. August 28, 2024:

Meeting of the 14th Dalai Lama with the 17th Karmapa Lama Ogyen Trinley Dorje in Zurich

It was the first meeting of the two high Tibetan lamas since 2017. The opportunity arose during a stopover by the Dalai Lama on his return journey from the USA to India. The Karmapa Lama reported on

the meeting in a message dated August 28. At the meeting, he felt a mixture of joy and sadness, wrote the Karmapa. “He seemed to have aged considerably, and [...] his voice has grown weak. It was so different from how he used to be that I could hardly bear it. His Holiness used all the strength of his body, speech and mind for our sake [...]. Given his physical condition and seeming exhaustion, I did not say much but expressed how there is nothing greater that he could do for Buddhism and sentient beings than to live long. [...] We must accomplish all his wishes for what he would like to accomplish in this lifetime soon; there is no time for delay or distraction.” In particular, according to the Karmapa, it is the hope of all Tibetans and the Dalai Lama’s own wish that he can return to Tibet once again in this life. Finally, the Karmapa called on the Tibetans to work together for the Dalai Lama, the Dharma and the Tibetan people (<https://kagyuooffice.org/gyalwang-karmapas-message-on-meeting-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama>).

The Dalai Lamas and the Karmapas are the highest-ranking lamas of their respective schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelug school and the Karma Kagyu school. However, there are two reincarnations for the current 17th Karmapa. The Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, born in 1985, is also recognized by the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. He was trained in the People’s Republic of China under government supervision and fled to India at the end of December 1999. The Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje (born 1983) was trained in India. Both Karmapas have stated several times since 2018 that they want to overcome the split in the Karma Kagyu lineage. *kwt*

September 2, 2024:

Inauguration of the “Xizang International Communication Center” in Lhasa

“Xizang” is the Chinese name for Tibet, which is now used by all official foreign-language media in China and, since the end of 2023, also by Chinese diplomacy and in the translations of texts from the Foreign Ministry (with which Beijing is trying to linguistically internationalize its claim to Tibet again, according to Johnny Erling in *China.Table*). “Through innovation, diverse channels and profound content,” the Xizang International Communication Center “will build a more effective international communication system for Xizang-related contents, so as to present a true, stereoscopic and comprehensive Xizang to the world, and well tell Xizang stories in the new era,” according to an official English-language report.

The inauguration took place at a meeting organized by the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of the Tibet Autonomous Region and the China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration. The Chinese name of the new center is 西藏国际传播中心. Its initiation “marks a significant step in China’s ongoing campaign to reshape international public opinion on Tibet,” wrote the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) in a commentary. ICT predicted a “significant escalation in China’s efforts to dominate the global conversation on Tibet” (<https://bitterwinter.org> Sept. 13; www.chinanews.com.cn Sept. 3; *China.Table* March 14; <https://savetibet.org> Sept. 11; <https://english.xzxw.com> Sept. 5). *kwt*

September 3, 2024:

Conference on “Reincarnation of Living Buddhas of Tibetan Buddhism: Historical Establishment of the System, Policies and Legal Norms” in Lanzhou

The conference in the provincial capital of Gansu on the issue of the reincarnation of Tibetan religious teachers (Tibetan *tulku*, Chinese *huofo* 活佛, “Living Buddha”) was attended by over 50 people, including Living Buddhas, Khenpos and other representatives of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as experts. Among those speaking were Master Changzang, a vice chairman of the Chinese Buddhist As-

sociation (CBA), and Living Buddha Jamyang, rector of the High Level Tibetan Buddhism College of China, which hosted the conference. The aim of the conference – according to the official report on the CBA website – was to guide monks, nuns and believers to “understand the historical determination, religious rituals, political guidelines and legal norms of the reincarnation system of living Buddhas more objectively.” They must fully understand that the important “historically determined” principles, namely “searching within the country, drawing lots from the Golden Urn and approval by the government,” must be adhered to. In this way, a positive contribution will be made to the healthy transmission of Tibetan Buddhism and its adaptation to socialist society, the report said (www.chinabuddhism.com.cn Sept. 4). *kwt*

September 7, 2024:

Chinese Institute for Advanced Studies of Pali Buddhism opens in Xishuangbanna

With a celebration to mark the start of the studies of the first 20 students, the Chinese Institute for Advanced Studies of Pali Buddhism (中国巴利语系高级佛学院) began operations on September 7 – that is, of Theravada Buddhism, which is also known in China as “Southern Tradition Buddhism” (南传佛教). Pali is the language of the canonical texts of Theravada Buddhism. The importance that the central government attaches to the new institute was demonstrated by the participation of Cheng Ruifeng, vice minister of the Central United Front Department and director of the National Religious Affairs Administration. He said the institute will become a training base, research center and exchange platform for China’s Theravada Buddhism. The new institute is a national-level facility operated by the Yunnan Buddhist Association on behalf of the Chinese Buddhist Association, according to *Buddhistdoor*. At the provincial level, the Yunnan Buddhist Academy has existed for decades, with branches for Theravada Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. The new institute is located in the General Temple of Xishuangbanna in Jinghong City, Yunnan Province. A campus for 500 students and teachers is under construction. Theravada Buddhism is widespread in Southeast Asia. In China, it is only found in Yunnan. According to official figures, there are about 1,700 Theravada Buddhist temples there, but only 2,000 registered monks, which is not enough to look after the temples and believers. According to a field study by anthropologist Ma Zhen in 2018, monks from Myanmar and Laos resided in 296 of the 589 Buddhist temples in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, and 100 temples had no resident monk. These – often well-educated – “migrant monks” have had problems with their residency status since the end of 2018 due to stricter regulations, Ma said in *Sixth Tone*. At the same time, according to *Buddhistdoor*, students from Yunnan have been sent to Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka to study Buddhism in recent years. Researcher Yang Zi wrote in *The Diplomat* in 2017 that “Chinese Theravada Buddhism is in no position to serve as a soft power agent given its underdevelopment.” This is now apparently about to change (<https://thediplomat.com> Aug. 15, 2017; www.buddhistdoor.org Sept. 10; www.sara.gov.cn Sept. 7; www.sixthtone.com June 27, 2022; www.worldjournal.com Sept. 7). *kwt*

September 20, 2024:

Meeting on “Guidance and Education of Lay Buddhist Communities”

The “Five-Year Plan for Advancing the Sinicization of Our Country’s Buddhism in Depth (2023–2027),” which was adopted in October 2023, in its section on “Comprehensive and strict governance of religion” contains a paragraph on “Strengthening the guidance and education of lay Buddhist communities [*jushi qunti* 居士群体].” At its meeting in Zibo (Shandong) on September 20, the Commission for Lay Buddhists of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) discussed how this should be implemented

and how the “lay Buddhist work” should be designed in the future. The Buddhist clergy should be a role model in guiding and educating lay Buddhist communities with regard to the active adaptation of Buddhism to socialist society – according to the report on the meeting on the CBA website. It was said at the meeting that more management of the affairs of lay Buddhists is necessary for the healthy transmission of Buddhism and for the development of society. In particular, lay Buddhist communities must be guided to hold religious activities in accordance with the law and regulations, according to the report. The meeting of the Commission for Lay Buddhists was chaired by its chairman, Master Huaifan (www.chinabuddhism.com.cn Sept. 20).

Lay Buddhists have made a formal commitment to Buddhism by accepting the threefold refuge (in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) and the five precepts (not killing living beings, not stealing, not sexual misconduct, not lying, not drinking alcohol). Lay Buddhists and their communities are generally less in the focus of religious-political regulation than the Buddhist clergy. *kwt*

October 15–17, 2024:

6th World Buddhist Forum meets in Ningbo

According to Chinese state media, around 800 participants from 72 nations came to the event in the coastal province of Zhejiang. Like the previous five World Buddhist Forums (世界佛教论坛) in 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018, it was organized by the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) and the China Religious Culture Communication Association. The theme was “Hand in Hand for Coexistence.”

At the end, the “Declaration of Mount Xuedou” was adopted (English text at www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/web/details/76259). In the face of unprecedented global changes, Buddhism must play a role as a cultural bridge connecting hearts and minds, the declaration states. Participants call on Buddhists around the world to preserve the healthy heritage of Buddhism, including through contemporary translations and interpretations of Buddhist scriptures, their digitization, and a simple, eco-friendly lifestyle. Research on contemporary Buddhist thought and practice should be encouraged, including “comparative studies between Han Buddhism’s Humanistic Buddhism tradition and important ideas that emerged in response to modern developments in Zang [i.e., Tibetan] Buddhism and Theravada.” The role of the World Buddhist Forums, as well as “the role of sacred Buddhist relics, root temples, and patriarchal Dharma lineages” for international Buddhist exchange and as bonds of faith should be strengthened, according to the statement.

Claire Vidal of the Université Lumière Lyon 2 said in an interview with *La Croix* that for Beijing, the World Buddhist Forums “serve both as a showcase for its domestic policy of ‘sinicizing religions’ and as a diplomatic platform on an Asian scale.” For Carsten Krause from the University of Hamburg, they also show “the increased self-confidence of Chinese Buddhists since the beginning of the 21st century” (*Global Times* Oct. 15; *La Croix* Oct. 17; *Tongzhan xinyu* according to www.sara.gov.cn Oct. 14; *Xinhua* Oct. 17; *Zhongguo xinwenwang* according to www.chinabuddhism.com.cn Oct. 18; C. Krause, “Auf Spurensuche 1978–2018: Zur Entwicklung des chinesischen Buddhismus in der Gegenwart,” in: *China heute* 2018, No. 3, pp. 176-188, here p. 181 [in German]). *kwt*

Islam

June 26–27, 2024:

5th International Congress “China and the Islamic World: Cultural Encounters and Mutual Learning” in Beijing

According to IRCICA, the conference was organized by the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the IRCICA (Research Center For Islamic His-

tory, Art and Culture), an institution under the Organization of Islamic Cooperation based in Istanbul. In their opening speeches, Zhao Zhimin (CASS) and Mahmud Erol Kılıç (IRCICA) emphasized the long history of encounters between Chinese and Islamic civilizations; both have played an important role in the cultural history of humanity and influenced each other, said Kılıç. Chinese Special Envoy for Middle East Affairs Zhai Jun said that China is ready to work with the Islamic side to implement the Global Civilization Initiative, strengthen the exchange of experience in the field of governance, and promote the common values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom. According to IRCICA, the main topics of the conference were the historical contacts between China and the Muslim world; encounters and influences in the arts and sciences (e.g. calligraphy, porcelain and painting); encounters in literature and philosophy (including religious traditions and Sufism); China and the Muslim world in today's global system (including peace promotion, new Silk Roads, energy issues). Previous conferences took place in 2012, 2015, 2017 and 2019 (www.globaltimes.cn June 27; www.ircica.org June 27; <http://iwr.cssn.cn> July 2). *kwt*

By July 8, 2024:

Over 10,000 Muslims from the People's Republic of China have returned home from the 2024 Hajj

This number is slightly lower than the last figure announced by the Chinese side of 12,000 Hajjis in 2017. Saudi Arabia sets pilgrimage quotas for each country every year. According to a report on the website of the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) – the only state-authorized organizer of pilgrimages to Mecca by Chinese citizens – the Chinese management team received an award for excellent organization and another award for environmental hygiene from the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. “Our pilgrims performed the Hajj obligatory acts smoothly and successfully under the unified organization of the Hajj group, adhered to the Sinicization of Islam, practiced the core socialist values, maintained the fine tradition of patriotism [...] and thus presented an all-round good image of Chinese Muslims,” says the report (www.chinaislam.net.cn July 14). *kwt*

Protestant Churches

July 2024:

Reprisals against Zion Church in Beijing

In 2018, the Beijing Zion Church 北京锡安教会, one of China's largest house churches with 1,500 members, was closed by the authorities. Its head pastor Ezra Jin 金明日 was placed under house arrest and is still not allowed to leave the country. His wife and children now live in the USA. On July 5, Pastor Jin was prevented from leaving mainland China at the Macau border crossing, although the travel ban against him officially ended in March of this year. On July 7, the following Sunday, at 10 a.m., a gathering of a smaller subgroup of the Zion Church with predominantly young believers in the Haidian district to celebrate a church service was interrupted by 20 officials. The personal details of all those present were recorded, and some people had to undergo questioning at the police station. Ms. Zhou Sirui 周思睿 was arrested and taken into administrative detention for activities on behalf of an unregistered association. She was released on July 22 (<https://bitterwinter.org> July 10; www.chinaaid.net July 6). *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

August 6, 2024:

Celebration of 70 years of the Patriotic Three-Self Movement

On August 6, 80 delegates, composed of representatives of the China Christian Council (CCC), the Shanghai Christian Council, the Shanghai Religious Affairs Administration, the YMCA and the academic world, gathered to celebrate the founding of the Patriotic Three-Self Movement as an organization. (The publication of the Christian Manifesto in the *People's Daily* on September 23, 1950 is also seen as the beginning of the Patriotic Three-Self Movement and is even named in the new catechism as a special commemoration day of the CCC. See report on the anniversary celebration of 70 years of the Patriotic Three-Self Movement in *RCTC* 2020, No. 4, p. 12). After singing the national anthem at 9 a.m., CCC President Wu Wei opened the conference with a speech in which he described the Three-Self Organization as a tool that serves to further integrate Christianity into Chinese socialism. In all Christian communities, it is necessary to spread enthusiasm for the party and its core principles, he said. Xu Xiaohong, Chairman of the Patriotic Three-Self Movement, called for the most important documents from the last Central Committee meeting of the CCP to be brought to the attention of believers in sermons. – After the conference, some participants visited the former home of the mastermind of the Three-Self Movement, Y.T. Wu, which has been converted into a memorial (www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/18109). *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

August 26, 2024:

Sculptor Gao Shen imprisoned

Gao Shen 高旻, born in 1956, the older of the two Christian artists known as the Gao brothers 高氏弟兄, was arrested near Beijing during a visit to China on August 26 and has been in custody since then. He is accused of violating the Law on the Protection of Heroes and Martyrs, which came into force in 2018 and prohibits the defamation of historical martyrs and heroes. However, the works in question are works that were created more than ten years ago. If convicted, Gao Shen could face up to three years in prison.

The brothers Gao Shen and Gao Qiang 高强 (born 1962), both from Shandong, have been working together artistically since the 1980s. They became known through publications such as “Chinese Avant-Garde Art” 中国前街艺术状况, with performance art on the subject of hugging and with a series of bronze sculptures critical of Mao. In addition to “Miss Mao,” a monstrous feminine comic figure (2006), this also includes “Execution of Christ” (2009), in which seven life-size statues of Mao Zedong aim guns at a defenseless Christ in a loincloth. Many of their works addressed the unresolved excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Their father was classified as a class enemy at the time and committed suicide in prison. Since 2003, the Gao brothers have maintained a gallery in Beijing’s 798 artists’ district, where they also lived until 2019. Their main residence is now New York. Other well-known Christian artists such as Dao Zi 岛子 and Zhu Jiuyang 朱久洋 have also left China in recent years. Works by the Gao brothers can be found in private collections and museums around the world, e.g. in the Centre Pompidou and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artist-gao-zhen-detained-2530305>). *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

September 29, 2024:

Christian author and school founder Zhu Bin in custody

On September 29, Zhu Bin 朱斌, born in 1973, a well-known activist, writer and professed Christian, was arrested for “inciting disturbances” in Beijing’s Haidian district. The “Deep breath learning center” (深呼吸学习中心), a private Christian all-day school for students in grades 1 to 9 with spe-

cial needs, which is linked to the house church movement, which he co-founded in 2017, has been searched several times by the police. A specific reason for the current arrest is currently unclear. In 2019, Zhu Bin supported the protests in Hong Kong on social media channels and wrote a poem entitled “The light is a sin” for the detained students. In 2021, he was critical of the arrest of investigative journalist Zhang Zhan, who was researching the mismanagement of the Covid19 pandemic in Wuhan. A year later, Zhu Bin launched a petition to clarify the case of a woman who was found in chains in Jiangsu Province. She had previously been sold by a human trafficker to a man who held her captive for years, during which she gave birth to a total of eight children. By writing this petition, Zhu Bin became more well-known in China (<https://bitterwinter.org> Oct. 08; <https://youtu.be/u871fYGW6xE>).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

August 17, 2024:

Inner Mongolia: Church of Niansiqingdi solemnly blesses the “Apostles Cemetery”

The blessing was presided over by the Bishop of Hohhot, Meng Qinglu, the Bishop of Jining, Yao Shun, and Bishop Du Jiang of Bameng. 18 priests from different dioceses, religious sisters and about 1,000 believers took part in the ceremony. The church of Niansiqingdi was built in 1902. 84 Belgian and Dutch missionaries of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM, also known as “Scheut Missionaries,” after the name of the Belgian town where the congregation was founded) were active in pastoral work and evangelization, in schools and in charitable institutions. According to the report from *Xinde*, 35 bishops, priests, brothers and sisters are buried in Niansiqingdi. Most of their remains were transferred to the now consecrated cemetery thanks to the efforts of the former pastor Fr. Yang Fuxi and believers. The village was founded in 1880. A CICM priest had acquired “24 hectares of land” (*niansi qing di* 廿四顷地) and donated it to refugee farmers from Shanxi and Shaanxi. They thanked the Church and many were baptized. In the following period, the number of believers increased rapidly. Soon after, the large church was built and Catholic villages were established in the area (*Xinde* Aug. 21). *kf*

August 27, 2024:

94-year-old “underground” Bishop Shi Hongzhen is officially installed as Bishop of Tianjin

“The Holy See has learned with satisfaction that today, 27 August 2024, Bishop Melchior Shi Hongzhen has been officially recognized under civil law as bishop of Tianjin (Municipality of Tianjin, People’s Republic of China). This measure is a positive fruit of the dialogue established over the years between the Holy See and the Chinese Government,” said a communiqué from the Holy See Press Office published on the same day. The ceremony took place in a hotel, which Bishop Shi is said to have requested in order to emphasize its civil character, since he was already Bishop of Tianjin under canon law, *AsiaNews* reported. According to a report on the website of the official Catholic governing bodies, Fr. Yang Yu, Secretary General of the Chinese Bishops’ Conference, read out the latter’s letter of approval. Bishop Li Shan of Beijing gave a speech. The report also states the contents of the oath the bishop took, including compliance with the law, patriotism, sinicization, etc., but not the principle of independence.

Bishop Shi Hongzhen 石鴻禎 was born in 1929, ordained a priest in 1954 and secretly ordained coadjutor bishop in 1982 by Bishop Li Side, whom he succeeded as bishop of Tianjin after his death in 2019. The last official ordinary bishop of Tianjin (not recognized by the Pope as such) died in 2005. Bishop Melchior Shi was under house arrest for years because of his refusal to join the Patriotic Association. Vatican diplomat Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli was able to meet Bishop Shi in 2022 when he was in Tianjin with a delegation for negotiations. The question of a successor for the elderly bishop has apparently not yet been resolved. According to Vatican information, the diocese of Tianjin has around 56,000 believers, 62 priests and “a good number” of nuns (www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/24081418-1.htm; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/08/27/240827a.html>; *AsiaNews* Aug. 27). *kwt*

August 28 to September 8, 2024:

Paolo Dongdong Camanni: Former orphan from a Catholic home in China takes 6th place in judo at the Paralympics in Paris

The young judo athlete, born in 2003, was abandoned on the street at the age of two and taken in by Chinese nuns in the diocese of Zhaoxian, Hebei Province. The boy suffered from bilateral retinoblastoma, a cancer of the eyes in infancy and childhood that left Dongdong blind. Dongdong is the name the sisters gave to the child they had saved. Thanks to them and the help of an Italian journalist, Dongdong then met his adoptive family in Italy. Dongdong was one of over six hundred abandoned disabled children who found a new home with the Sisters of the Congregation of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. The children’s home “House of Dawn” run by the Sisters was founded in the late 1980s by Bishop Raimundus Wang Chonglin, then bishop of the diocese of Zhaoxian. Today the Sisters are also active in the rehabilitation sector. In recent years, however, the Sisters have been subjected to increasing pressure from the state, so that they have had to give up certain areas of work. – Dongdong represented Italy at the Games. He came sixth in the lightweight category up to 73 kg. Paralympic judo is exclusively for athletes with visual impairments (*Fides* Sep. 3; *sempre news* Sep. 7). *kf*

September 2024:

Start of the new academic year at the Catholic theological seminaries

The Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai welcomed 25 seminarians for the new academic year, including 10 first-year students. In addition, there are the 14 Sisters in the first sister training course at the Sheshan Seminary and 3 Sisters for trial studies (修女初试生). At the National Seminary in Beijing, Bishop Li Shan welcomed 17 new seminarians. He admonished them with words from Pope Francis about the importance of Holy Mass, prayer and listening to God’s word for the spiritual life, as well as reading good books and giving up what is superfluous.

At the Beijing Diocese’s seminary, a five-day military training for the seminarians began on October 1. There were also reports of a week-long military training for first-year students at the Chinese Koran Institute in early September. Military training is compulsory at Chinese universities (www.chinacatholic.cn Oct. 10; www.chinainislam.net.cn Sept. 2; www.xinde.org Sept. 12). *kwt*

October 1 / 7, 2024:

Jiujiang parish in Jiangxi celebrates 75th anniversary of the founding of the State / follows the Pope’s call for prayer for peace

The two reports were posted on the *Xinde* website on the same day; they are an example of how communities seek to maintain a balance between state-required patriotism and loyalty to the Pope and the

Church and combine the two. On October 1, the national flag was ceremoniously raised in the churchyard of Jiujiang. The pastor, Fr. Pang Rui, explained that the ceremony was intended to strengthen the national consciousness and national pride of the believers so that they understand that faith and patriotism are not contradictions, but complement and promote each other. The report on the event notes that October 1 is also the day of Little Saint Therese for the Church and the beginning of the month of the Rosary.

For October 7, Pope Francis had called for a day of prayer and fasting for peace in the world. According to the second report, Fr. Pang Rui immediately sent the appeal to all parishioners and led prayer, fasting and the rosary in the parish church on October 7. The report said that during the communal prayer, everyone felt that the power of religion could move people's hearts. The Pope's appeal encourages people to be synodal and to contribute to world peace across ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries, according to the report (www.xinde.org Oct. 8). *kwt*

October 16, 2024:

Commission for Liturgy, Sacred Music and Art unveils the new nationwide "Book of Hours"

The plan decided two years ago to create nationwide uniform prayer and hymn books for the Catholic Church in China is apparently making progress. At its meeting in Anhui, the Commission for Liturgy, Sacred Music and Art of the official Catholic governing bodies unveiled the first copies of the new uniform "Book of Hours of the Holy Church" (圣教日课). A promotional video for the "Book of Hours" and pre-order options were presented. The uniform "Hymn Book" (圣歌本) does not seem to be completely finished yet, follow-up work has been discussed. The heads of the commission are the bishops Liu Xinhong of Anhui and Cui Qingqi of Wuhan (www.xinde.org Oct. 18; cf. *RCTC* 2024, No. 1, p. 12). *kwt*

October 25, 2024:

Matthew Zhen Xuebin 甄雪斌 is consecrated as coadjutor bishop of the Diocese of Beijing

It was the fourth episcopal ordination in 2024 under the provisional Sino-Vatican agreement. It was announced on the day of the ordination on the website of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association CCPA and the Bishops' Conference as well as in the Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office (following the pattern of the announcements of the ordinations in January of this year in Zhengzhou and Minbei, cf. *China heute* 2024, No. 1, pp. 24, 26 [in German]). The consecrating bishops were Li Shan (Beijing), Guo Jincai (Chengde) and Li Suguang (Jiangxi), and the bishops Ding Lingbin (Changzhi) and Yao Shun (Jining) concelebrated. Fr. Yang Yu read the letter of approval from the Chinese Bishops' Conference, which – as *Fides* confirmed – contained the sentence "The Pope has approved this candidate" (此人选已经教宗同意).

Coadjutor Bishop Zhen was born on May 10, 1970 in Changzhi, in Shanxi Province. From 1988 to 1993 he studied at the seminary of the Diocese of Beijing and from 1993 to 1997 at St. John's University in New York, where he obtained a licentiate in liturgical studies (according to *AsiaNews* he also obtained a second degree in theology on the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. The Chinese announcement does not mention Zhen's studies abroad). In 1998 he was ordained a priest and incardinated in the Diocese of Beijing. From 1998 to 2007 he was vice-rector of the diocesan seminary, and since 2007 chancellor of the diocese. From 2014 to June 2024 he was also vice-chairman of the Catholic Patriotic Association of the City of Beijing, and has been its chairman since June 2024. On March 21, 2024, he was elected coadjutor-designate of the Diocese of Beijing. On August 28, 2024, Pope Francis appointed him coadjutor of Beijing.

Commentators have puzzled over why Archbishop Li Shan of Beijing, born in 1965, needs a coadjutor who is only slightly younger and has the right to succeed him. *AsiaNews* reported, citing sources, that Bishop Li Shan asked for a coadjutor for health reasons, but also because of his many commitments outside Beijing as chairman of the CCPA. Matthew Zhen is known to many visitors from the world Church because he was often involved in welcoming foreign guests due to his knowledge of English (www.chinacatholic.cn/ccic/report/2410/0263-1.htm; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2024/10/25/0827/01648.html>; *AsiaNews* Oct. 18; *Fides* Oct. 25 [English and Chinese]). *kwt*

Sino-Vatican Relations

July 2, 2024:

Vatican “Foreign Minister” urges respect for international law in the South China Sea

During a visit to the Philippines, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the Vatican’s Secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations, held a joint press conference with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo. Gallagher was asked about the Vatican’s position on the conflicts between China and various Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines, in the South China Sea. “The position of the Holy See is quite clear,” Archbishop Gallagher said in his response, according to *AsiaNews*. “In such situations of conflict, whatever they are, first of all, that every effort must be made, that any differences, conflict, are resolved peacefully. We would encourage parties in conflict to abide by international law, and to pursue [...] that as a way of resolving difficulties and problems with the best interests of all involved.” (*AsiaNews* July 2; *LICAS* July 2). *kwt*

August 9, 2024:

Fides: Pope Francis in an interview about his desire to meet bishops and the people of God in China

The Vatican news service *Fides* published in August excerpts from an interview that Pope Francis gave in May to the head of the press office of the Jesuit China Province, Fr. Pedro Chia. According to *Fides*, Pope Francis said he would like to visit the Marian shrine on Mount Sheshan near Shanghai. “I would like to meet with local bishops and the people of God who are so faithful. They have gone through many things and remained faithful.” When asked what message he wanted to send to young Chinese Catholics today, he said: “Hope,” but added: “It seems tautological to me to give a message of hope to a people who are masters of hope and of patience in waiting.” This is a very beautiful thing, said the Pope. The people of China are a great people who must not waste their heritage, on the contrary, they must carry it forward patiently (*Fides* Aug. 9). *kwt*

August 14, 2024:

Papal peace envoy for Ukraine, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, speaks on the phone with the Chinese government’s special envoy for Eurasian affairs, Li Hui

A note about the phone call appeared in the Bulletin of the Holy See and on the website of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The phone call took place (according to the Chinese account) at the request

of Cardinal Zuppi and followed from the meeting between the two in Beijing in September 2023 (see *RCTC* 2023, No. 4, p. 16). During the phone call, “great concern was expressed about the situation and the need to foster dialogue between the parties, with adequate international guarantees for a just and lasting peace,” according to the Vatican report. The Chinese Foreign Ministry report also reported that Li Hui had expressed his appreciation for the Vatican’s mediation efforts and humanitarian aid in the “Ukraine crisis.” Zuppi, in turn, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry report, thanked the Chinese government on behalf of the Pope for its tireless efforts to promote peace and expressed his appreciation for the Chinese-Brazilian six-point plan to resolve the Ukraine crisis (<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2024/08/15/0614/01250.html>; www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/wjbxw/202408/t20240815_11472913.html; *Global Times* Aug. 15; *Vatican News* Aug. 15). *kwt*

September 13, 2024:

Pope Francis on the return flight from Singapore: “China is a promise and a hope for the Church”

During the press conference on the plane, Pope Francis was asked if there was room for cooperation for peace between the Holy See and China and if he was satisfied with the results so far of the Sino-Vatican agreement on episcopal appointments. The Pope replied: “I am satisfied with the dialogue with China, the result is good, work is also being done with good will regarding the appointment of bishops. I asked the Secretariat of State how things are going: I am satisfied.” He continued: “Another question is China: China is an *ilusión* [a longing] for me, in the sense that I would like to visit China because it is a great country; I admire China, I respect China. It is a country with a millennial culture, with a capacity for dialogue and mutual understanding that transcends the various systems of government it has had. I believe that China is a promise and a hope for the Church.” To the first question, he said: “We can work together, and certainly in the face of conflict. At the moment, Cardinal Zuppi is working in this sense and also has relations with China” (www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/speeches/2024/september/documents/20240913-singapore-voloritorno.html). *kwt*

October 2–27, 2024:

Two bishops from Mainland China participate – for the first time in full – in the second session of the World Synod in Rome

Two bishops from Mainland China had participated in the first round of the World Synod “For a Synodal Church – Communion, Participation, Mission” in October 2023, but they left again after 12 days. The full participation of two bishops from Mainland China – for the first time ever since the Synods of Bishops were begun – was seen as an important step forward for the Chinese Church and Sino-Vatican relations. One of this year’s two participants was Bishop Yang Yongqiang, who already participated (partly) last year. Since his transfer in June 2024 he is Bishop of Hangzhou. The second was Bishop Zhan Silu of Mindong in Fujian Province, who – unusually – replaced Bishop Anton Yao Shun of Jining, who had participated in 2023. Bishop Zhan was ordained without papal approval in 2000 and only subsequently recognized by the Pope in 2018 as part of the provisional agreement on bishop appointments.

The two bishops spoke to the Synod, as Andrea Tornielli reported in *Vatican News* (Oct. 17). “The Church in China is the same as the Catholic Church in other countries of the world: we belong to the same faith, share the same baptism, and we are all faithful to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” Bishop Yang told the assembly, according to *Vatican News*. He also said, “We follow the evangelical spirit of ‘becoming all things to all people’ [...]. We effectively adapt to society, serve it, adhere to the direction of the sinicization of Catholicism, and preach the Good News.” He welcomed Catholic communities and religious groups from all countries to visit China.

Bishop Zhan explained to the Synod that the cause of the historic setback in the Rites Controversy was that the Church had ignored the differences and complementarity of human cultures. Being a synodal Church means “respecting and listening to the voices of different stories, cultures, and traditions in the journey of seeking humanity’s ultimate goal, which is God,” Bishop Zhan said according to *Vatican News*. He then named some current problems of the Chinese Church.

As last year, Cardinal Stephen Chow SJ and Vanessa Cheng Siu Wai, a lay representative, took part from Hong Kong. Bishop Norbert Pu Ying-hsiung of Chiayi came again from Taiwan (*CNA* Oct. 8; *Fides* Sept. 16; *Kung Kao Po* Oct. 10 according to *Xinde* Oct. 12; *Vatican News* Oct. 17 [English and Chinese]; see also *RCTC* 2023, No. 4, p. 16). *kwf*

October 22, 2024:

The Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops is renewed again – this time for four years

The extension was announced on the same day in the Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office and by the spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

“In light of the consensus reached for an effective application of the Provisional Agreement regarding the Appointment of Bishops, after appropriate consultation and assessment, the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China have agreed to extend further its validity for four years from the present date. The Vatican Party remains dedicated to furthering the respectful and constructive dialogue with the Chinese Party, in view of the further development of bilateral relations for the benefit of the Catholic Church in China and the Chinese people as a whole,” the Holy See’s Bulletin said.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said that both sides had positively assessed the implementation of the agreement and, through friendly consultation, had agreed to extend it for another four years. He also announced that the talks would continue in a constructive spirit.

According to *AsiaNews*, the extension to four years was probably a compromise, as China wanted to make the agreement permanent, but the Vatican insisted on its provisional nature and the need to clarify some points. The agreement was signed on September 22, 2018, and extended for two years in 2020 and 2022. Most observers assumed that the content of the agreement had not been changed this time either; however, Cardinal Chow said in an interview with *America* that he presumed that this time some additions had been made. *America*’s interviewer Gerard O’Connell confirmed that “America understands from other informed sources in Rome that some changes asked for by the Vatican have been made.” The text of the agreement remains secret.

After a low point in the implementation of the agreement in April 2023 with the unilateral transfer of Bishop Shen Bin to Shanghai, which was only approved by the Pope three months later, there were a number of positive results in 2024: in particular four episcopal ordinations (including that of coadjutor Zhen Xuebin in Beijing on October 25), the official recognition of “underground” Bishop Shi Hongzhen on August 27 and the full participation of the two bishops in the World Synod. Since the agreement was signed in 2018, a total of 10 bishops (including Zhen Xuebin) have been ordained within its framework. Around 30 bishoprics in Mainland China are still vacant (<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2024/10/22/0813/01615.html>; www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202410/t20241022_11511374.html; *America* Oct. 24; *AsiaNews* Oct. 22, 23). *kwf*

Hong Kong

July 1, 2024:

England: Catholic Bishops' Conference sets up coordinating group for Catholic migrants from Hong Kong

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales set up the Hong Kong Catholic Migrants Pastoral Coordination Group on July 1 to support the growing number of Hong Kong Catholic migrants in Great Britain. The group will initially operate for a year under the leadership of Bishop Paul McAleenan, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster and responsible for migrant and refugee issues within the Bishops' Conference. The coordinating group consists of a team of seven Hong Kongers who have relocated to England, including the recently ordained Deacon James Shin. At a meeting on July 10, Bishop McAleenan emphasized the four principles of welcoming newly arrived migrants from Pope Francis' message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2018: "welcome, protect, promote and integrate." Deacon Shin said the group's fourfold mission is in line with the Pope's principles: "to liaise between Hong Kong Catholic migrant communities in England and Wales and the bishops' conference to ensure effective communication and collaboration; to ensure the local communities receive pastoral support by liaising with local groups and facilitate social and faith-based gatherings; to act as the first point of contact for visiting Cantonese-speaking priests when needed," writes the *Sunday Examiner*. In addition, the group offers various services at the national and local levels to promote the faith of migrants with the support of local communities. In July, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha OFM of Hong Kong visited England and welcomed the work of the coordinating group. The group's logo symbolizes Catholic, British and Hong Kong elements (*Sunday Examiner* Aug. 2; www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=455501323938195&set=a.125492450272419; www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20170815_world-migrants-day-2018.html; see also *RCTC* 2024, No. 3, p. 20f.). *kf*

July 25-28, 2024:

Spain / Hong Kong: "3rd World Encounter of Teresian Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue: Tibetan Buddhism and Carmelite Spirituality. Orientations for the Visualization, Contemplation and Perception of the Sacred"

The conference was organized from July 25 to 28 in Ávila by the Catholic Order of Discalced Carmelites and the International Centre of Teresian and Sanjuanist Studies (CITeS) of Ávila, Spain, in collaboration with the Centre of Buddhist Studies (CBS) at the University of Hong Kong and the Spanish Fundación Dharma-Gaia. According to the report by *Buddhistdoor Global*, "50-100 participants" took part in the in-person and online event. It was the third cooperation between CITeS and CBS. The "1st World Encounter of Teresian Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue: Theravāda Buddhism and Teresian Mysticism" took place from 27-30 July 2017. A second conference on Discalced Carmelites and Zen Buddhism, which was planned for July 2020, had to be cancelled due to the Covid pandemic. The aim of the third conference, according to the report, was to "explore shared elements and differences in Carmelite and Tibetan Buddhist practices." Both traditions emphasized the importance of morality, prayer and contemplation "as means of attaining union with the ultimate." In addition to lectures on the topic, the participants also engaged in religious practices and rites of both traditions. The conference concluded with a renewed commitment to interfaith dialogue, "fostering understanding and respect among dif-

ferent religious traditions,” thus the report (*Buddhistdoor Global* Aug. 1; for the program see www.academia.edu/105639638/programm_3rd_world_encounter_teresian_mysticism_and_interreligious_dialogue_Tibetan_Buddhism_and_Carmelite_spirituality_orientations_to_visualize_contemplate_and_find_the_sacred). *kf*

August 25, 2024:

Hong Kong: Seminar on Preventive Protection – Establishment of a dedicated diocesan office

During the seminar hosted by the Diocesan Catechetical Centre at St. Jude’s Parish in North Point, new measures to protect children and vulnerable persons in the Diocese of Hong Kong were discussed. The seminar was aimed at Sunday school teachers and catechists. – The diocese is taking an important step towards improving child protection mechanisms with the establishment of the Diocesan Safeguarding Minors and Vulnerable Persons Office – St. Goretti’s Centre. The office is scheduled to begin operations in 2025. The aim of the office, according to LICAS, is “to develop a more robust protection system within the diocese, involving training, guideline drafting, and complaint management” (*LICAS* Aug. 29). *kf*

August 30, 2024:

Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., in Hong Kong: “Go, meet and see”

In reflections on the theme of “Time to rest and reflect,” which were published on August 30 in the Hong Kong diocesan newspaper *Sunday Examiner*, the cardinal meditates, in view of his own vacation days, on the importance of preserving nature in the urban environment in order to ensure people’s quality of life. “Of course, quality of life is not just about a better natural environment or having a larger living space. It also entails a living culture that conscientiously cultivates respectful human relationships and embraces religions that promote psycho-spiritual health as well as social well-being. It is also about honouring plurality while encouraging unity, cherishing civil freedoms with a legal system that dwells not on fears but positive incentives, and giving its people – especially the younger generations – a positive outlook on life with a hope-filled future,” the Cardinal writes. “There is certainly room for our personal and collective improvements. However, Hong Kong is still, by and large, a safe and livable city with its own charms.” At this point the Cardinal notes: “Sadly, according to friends and acquaintances living in foreign countries, they are informed that Hong Kong is unstable and unsafe for visitors and civil freedom in Hong Kong is seriously restricted. Indeed, I have clearly encountered these negative publicities during my travels over the past two years until just recently. I am unsure of the exact reasons behind the forming of international community’s current perception of Hong Kong. But it certainly does not accurately represent Hong Kong.” The Cardinal says to those friends and acquaintances, including leaders and lay people of the Catholic Church, who are worrying about Hong Kong: “Please come to see for yourselves what Hong Kong really is like” (*Sunday Examiner*, Aug. 30). *kf*

September 1, 2024:

Hong Kong: Church people, scholars and medical experts discuss gender theory

The Catholic Holy Spirit Seminary College of Theology and Philosophy, together with the Bioethics Resource Centre of its Theological Faculty, founded in 2011, held a symposium on gender theory at the Catholic Diocesan Centre in Hong Kong on September 1. Over 80 scholars, medical experts and religious leaders from mainland China, Taiwan, Macau and Hong Kong discussed the impact of gender

theory on society and the Church. Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing OFM opened the symposium, addressing the conflict between Catholic teaching and contemporary gender theory. Deacon Thomas Lam Chiu-wan discussed the challenges posed by the increasing acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities for the traditional Christian perspectives on marriage and family. Dr. Hong Kwai-wah, a psychiatrist and founder of the Hong Kong Psychosexual Education Association, warned of the risks of irreversible medical treatments for transgender people. Professor Kwan Kai-man of Hong Kong Baptist University discussed the societal impact of transgender identity. Kwan also examined the tension between individual legal rights and social norms. Dr Charon Cheang Teng-fong, chairperson of the Association of Catholic Health Service Personnel of Macau, discussed the challenges of treating gender dysphoria in Macau. A representative from China reported on the experiences and challenges of LGBTQ+ Christians in China, particularly within churches. He wished for a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ people within the Christian community. Dr Andrew Yeh Wei-chiang of E-da Dachang Hospital in Taiwan spoke about the experiences of transgender people in Taiwanese society (*Sunday Examiner* Sept. 13) *kf*

June 21-28 / August 18-25, 2024:

Catholic youth exchange between young people from Hong Kong and Berlin

Ten Catholic young people from Hong Kong took part in a week-long cultural and journalistic exchange in Berlin in June under the aegis of the Bund der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend [BDKJ] [German Catholic Youth] and the Hong Kong Diocesan Youth Commission. They were accompanied by Fr. Tito Martin, the chairman of the Youth Commission, and some staff members. The journalism initiative in Berlin enabled an intercultural youth exchange between the young people. The program offered the participants the opportunity to acquire various media skills, including writing, video production and audio editing, and involved them in group discussions on various topics. On one day, the participants visited the public broadcaster Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg RBB. According to Fr. Martin, the program came about through the diocesan partnership between Hong Kong and Essen. The initiative came from a former member of the Youth Commission of the Diocese of Essen who moved to Berlin. Among the young people from Berlin were also a Muslim and several atheists. From August 18 to 25, the young people from Berlin paid a return visit to the diocese of Hong Kong. The program included visits to various Catholic institutions such as Mercy HK, the Missionaries of Charity in Nam Cheong and the Caritas Community Centre in Tsuen Wan. The focus was mainly on charitable institutions and the treatment of social problems in Hong Kong, such as homelessness and drug addiction. On August 20, Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., met with the young people and celebrated a Holy Mass with them in the cathedral (*Sunday Examiner* Aug. 9). *kf*

Taiwan

August 1, 2024:

Mainland Chinese becomes rector of the Catholic theological faculty at Fu Jen University in Taiwan

On August 1, Fr. Cui Baochen 崔寶臣 was appointed the new rector of the Faculty of Theology of St Robert Bellarmine at the Catholic Fu Jen University in Taipei. He comes from mainland China and has a doctorate in biblical studies from the University of Fribourg. He previously earned a mas-

ter's degree in biblical studies in France. He is an expert on the Old Testament. Fr. Cui Baochen succeeds Fr. Jeffrey Chang SJ 鄭家樂 (www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=957119056215737&set=pb.100057529542977.-2207520000 Aug. 1). *kf*

September 20, 2024:

Taiwan: Death penalty remains – albeit limited

The Taiwanese Constitutional Court ruled in a groundbreaking and eagerly awaited ruling that although the death penalty does not contradict the constitution, it may only be applied for the most serious crimes, especially murder. The court stated that the right to life is protected by the Taiwanese constitution, but this protection is not absolute. 37 people sentenced to death had brought the lawsuit. Individual complainants can now request a reassessment of their case. Activists who campaign for the abolition of the death penalty were disappointed. There are currently 45 people on death row. According to surveys, a majority of the Taiwanese population is in favor of the death penalty (*China Table* Sept. 23; *Deutsche Welle* Sept. 20; *NZZ* Sept. 22; *taz* Sep. 21). *kf*

October 2, 2024:

Rome: Reception of Taiwan's Ambassador to the Vatican

On the occasion of the celebrations for Taiwan's national holiday on October 10, Matthew Lee, Taiwan's Ambassador to the Holy See, hosted a reception in Rome on October 2. "Taiwan has enjoyed diplomatic relations with the Holy See for 82 years. That's very important because it means the Holy See recognizes Taiwan as a country that values religious freedom and its communion with the universal Church," Lee told *CNA*. The reception was attended by Cardinals Giovanni Battista Re, Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga and Silvano Tomasi, as well as Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio and other Vatican representatives and diplomats accredited to the Holy See. The Vatican is one of the remaining 12 nations in the world that maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Taiwanese Catholics make up 3% of the population but are very powerful, the ambassador said. According to Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, over 10,000 people attended Taiwan's National Eucharistic Congress on October 5. Bishop Norbert Pu of Chiayi, a participant in the Vatican synod, spoke to *CNA* at the reception about the significance of the Vatican's recognition for Taiwanese Catholics. "We hope we can always maintain this formal and good relationship with the Vatican. Because for Taiwan, this is very important. We hope that the world will see this because Taiwan is a democratic and free country, respected by other nations," Pu said (*Catholic News Agency* Oct. 11; www.licas.news/2024/10/11/taiwans-ambassador-to-vatican-highlights-partnership-in-charity-and-peace/). *kf*

October 5, 2024:

Cardinal John Tong of Hong Kong as papal envoy to the Fifth National Eucharistic Congress in Taiwan

The congress in Kaoshiung on the theme "Fraternity Heals All" was attended by over 13,000 believers from all over Taiwan, including cardinals, bishops, priests, nuns and lay people from Taiwan's seven dioceses, representatives of the government, various religious organizations, charities and schools. The Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, Cardinal John Tong, held the closing Mass, which was attended by 300 clergy. At the beginning of the Mass, an apostolic blessing from Pope Francis was read by Archbishop Stefano Mazzotti, Chargé d'affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature in Taipei. In a letter dated August 15, the Pope invited Cardinal Tong as his envoy to speak about the need for true fraternity to heal the world in the light of the gospel. The congress was the conclusion of a year of catechisms and liturgical cel-

celebrations in the various dioceses of Taiwan and was linked to the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress in Quito, Ecuador, in September. The congress in Taiwan was opened by Archbishop Peter Lau Cheng-chung of Kaohsiung. The congress began with an opening procession with the relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis, who died at the age of 15. During the day there were various performances and catechetical teachings, among other things. The congress center also hosted a large exhibition on Eucharistic miracles. The next congress will take place in the diocese of Tainan in 2028 (*AsiaNews* Oct. 6; *Sunday Examiner* Oct. 18). *kf*

Authors' Abbreviations:

Katharina Feith (*kf*)

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber (*kwt*)

This “News Update” was first published in *China heute* 2024, No. 3, pp. 155-164 (in German).

Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the “News Update” refer to the year 2024.