

Religions & Christianity in Today's China

Vol. XVI 2026 No. 3

中國宗教評論



Contents

Editorial | 2

News Update on Religion and Church in China

March 14 – June 26, 2026 | 3

Compiled by Katharina Feith, Katrin Fiedler, Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle),
and Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

In Dialogue about Religious Art and Architecture in Germany and China – The
Third German–Chinese Interreligious Consultation, Berlin, May 6–8, 2026 | 25

Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle)

Wandering Afar

Franz Xaver Biallas (1878–1936), China Missionary of the Society of the
Divine Word, Sinologist and Founder of the Journal *Monumenta Serica* | 30

Barbara Hoster

In memoriam

Frank Joseph Shulman (1943–2026) | 53

Barbara Hoster

Imprint – Legal Notice | 55

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Today we are pleased to present you with the August 2026 issue of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* (中国宗教评论), which is the third issue this year.

We continue with the regular series of News Updates on recent events and general trends with regard to religions and especially Christianity in today's China.

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle, Hamburg/Germany, reports on “The Third German–Chinese Interreligious Consultation” which took place in Berlin from May 6–8, 2026. According to the author, the consultation themed “Religious Art & Architecture in Context” was “a vital sign of the importance of friendly exchange and the continuation of official relations in the religious field between both countries.”

Dr. Barbara Hoster, Monumenta Serica Institute, Sankt Augustin/Germany, in her article “Wandering Afar. Franz Xaver Biallas (1878–1936), China Missionary of the Society of the Divine Word, Sinologist and Founder of the Journal *Monumenta Serica*” gives a fascinating outline of Fr. Biallas's life and follows the traces he left behind in the histories of both the S.V.D. and Sinology itself.

The issue closes with an obituary – also written by Dr. Barbara Hoster – of the renowned American scholar of Asian Studies, librarian, and bibliographer Frank Joseph Shulman (1943–2026), who passed away on May 9, 2026 in College Park, Maryland.

Religions & Christianity in Today's China is freely available on the website of the China-Zentrum, www.china-zentrum.de. Additionally, readers who subscribe to *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* will regularly receive e-mail updates providing web links to the contents of each newly published issue. – The China-Zentrum is a non-profit organization. For the publication of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* we are dependent on the generosity of our friends and readers. In order to help us cover inevitable costs, we would be very grateful if you could consider sending a voluntary contribution.

Sankt Augustin, August 2026

The Editors

News Update on Religion and Church in China March 14 – June 26, 2026

Compiled by Katharina Feith, Katrin Fiedler, Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle),
and Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

Translated by David Streit S.V.D.

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, chronological overlaps may occur between “News Updates” of two consecutive RCTC issues. 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 2026, no. 1, pp. 3–20) covered the period November 30, 2025 – March 20, 2026.

Miscellaneous

March 14, 2026:

On the death of Jürgen Habermas

Jürgen Habermas (born June 18, 1929, in Düsseldorf; died March 14, 2026, in Starnberg) was one of the most significant contemporary German thinkers; as a philosopher and sociologist, he further developed Critical Theory and is associated with the second generation of the Frankfurt School. He also regularly engaged in socio-political debates. With the growing interest in the Frankfurt School in China, his work garnered significant attention there starting in the late 1990s. (For the reception of the Frankfurt School in China, see, e.g., Iwo Amelung – Annett Dippner [eds.], *Kritische Verhältnisse: Die Rezeption der Frankfurter Schule in China*, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag 2009.) Works of his translated into Chinese include *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, *Legitimation Crisis*, *The Inclusion of the Other*, and *Between Facts and Norms*. Secondary literature on Habermas was also widely translated. This keen interest extended to circles of religious studies and theology in China, where Habermas’s engagement with post-secular society – following the events of September 11, 2001 – was a subject of discussion. Worthy of mention in this context is the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies (ISCS) in Hong Kong, which has regularly brought together scholars and topics related to the German philosopher over the past two decades. For instance, a volume published by the ISCS on Habermas and Sino-Christian theology focuses on the reception of Habermas within the field of Sino-Christian Studies (Zhang Qingxiong – Jason Lam (eds.), *Jürgen Habermas and Sino-Christian Theology / Habeimasi yu Hanyu shenxue* 哈貝馬斯與漢語神學, Hong Kong: Logos and Pneuma Press, ISCS Monograph Series, 2007). Among other topics, essays in the volume address the widely noted 2004 dialogue between Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger – the future Pope Benedict XVI. Most recently, the ISCS published the Chinese translation of a book by Hak Joon Lee, *Covenant and Communication: A Christian Moral Conversation with Jürgen Habermas*, Hong Kong: Logos and Pneuma

Translation Series, 2025). Scholars in the field of Sino-Christian Studies who have studied Habermas's work include Cao Weidong 曹衛東, Yu Zhejun 郁喆隽, Jason Tsz-shun Lam (Lin Zichun 林子淳), Zhang Qingxiong 張慶熊, Tong Shijun 童世駿, and Chin Ken Pa (Zeng Qingbao 曾慶豹) (Institute of Sino-Christian Studies: <https://iscs.org.hk>). *kfr*

General Politics

April 30 / June 24, 2026:

EU Parliament resolution criticizes “Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress” – State Council Information Office press conference rejects “Western narratives”

The “Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress” (民族團結進步促進法) was adopted on March 12, 2026. In a resolution on April 30, the European Parliament “strongly condemn[ed] China’s repressive assimilation policies.” It stated that the new law deviated significantly from China’s 1984 “Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law” and restricted the cultural, religious, and linguistic freedoms of various population groups in China. The EU Parliament “deplores the law’s extraterritorial provisions constituting transnational repression” and calls on all EU member states to “suspend extradition treaties with China.” Furthermore, it “strongly rejects Chinese authorities’ attempts to interfere in the recognition and education of Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leaders.” – According to the *Global Times*, a press conference held by the State Council Information Office regarding the new law dismissed such “Western narratives.” It argued that they disregarded the major achievements made in China’s ethnic regions, such as poverty alleviation and infrastructure development. The press conference took place on June 24, just days before the new law was set to enter into force on July 1. Seated on the panel were, among others, representatives of the United Front Work Department: Chen Ruifeng, the former head of the National Religious Affairs Administration, and his successor in that role, Duan Yijun (www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2026-0152_DE.html; *Global Times* June 24). – For contributions from official religious organizations, see the entries dated June 24, 2026, in the “Islam” section and May 14, 2026, in the “Catholic Church” section. For the content of the law, cf. *RCTC* 2026, no. 2, p. 3–4. *kwt*

June 2, 2026:

Families of Tiananmen victims prevented from holding commemorations

For years, the families of victims of the crackdown of the 1989 protest movement have been accustomed to collectively marking the June 4 anniversary at the cemetery under police surveillance. This year, for the first time in three decades, the “Tiananmen Mothers” – as the group is known – were forbidden from visiting Wan’an Cemetery around the time of the anniversary. “If we want to go to the memorial, we have to wait until after the 6th,” Zhang Xianling, one of the Tiananmen Mothers, told *Radio Free Asia*. Collective acts of remembrance, such as the reading of ritual texts or commemorative speeches, were prohibited. Under orders from the Beijing Public Security Bureau, families were told to avoid June 4 as a day of remembrance; instead, they had to apply individually for permission to visit the cemetery and, if approved, carry out the visit accompanied by a security officer. Relatives of the victims had already been subjected to heightened surveillance in the run-up to the anniversary, with security personnel stationed around their homes. “When I go out, three people follow me,” 89-year-old Zhang said (www.rfa.org/english/china/2026/06/02/china-tiananmen-mothers-cemetery-ban-beijing/; *RFA Mandarin* June 2; *Bitter Winter* June 10; *LICAS* June 5). *kfr*

Religious Policies

March 30, 2026:

Revised regulations on funeral administration come into force – setting up new for-profit funeral companies is no longer permitted

At the end of March, amended “Regulations on Funeral Administration” (*Binzang guanli tiaoli* 殡葬管理条例) came into force. They are significantly more extensive than the previous version from 2012 and have, among other things, the aim of “improving funeral administration” (Art. 1). Obviously, they are intended to promote the coordination of the numerous authorities involved in the funeral sector and to lead to a standardization of many aspects that have so far been regulated at the local level. Until now, for example, there have been regionally different regulations as to whether only religious staff or also laypeople can be buried in religious sites (*Weiyan zongjiao* 微言宗教 June 28, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/A3YrbJSWOyOlp5HmLh1xcQ>). Another aim of the regulation is to “prudently advance” the funeral reform. The background to the reform efforts is the ongoing loss of agricultural land due to urbanization and thus the shortage of space not only for food security, but also for the earth burials traditionally practiced by the Han Chinese. These are often not carried out in designated cemeteries, but in the open air and taking favorable *fengshui* aspects into account. The previous version of the regulation had therefore focused on promoting cremation; burials in the ground are now banned in many places. Sea burials and other alternative forms have been promoted in cities like Shanghai for years. The shortage of space has led to some city dwellers buying apartments in order to set them up as memorials for their deceased. Not only do these have a longer guaranteed useful life, namely 70 years compared to the 20-year useful life of cemetery graves, but they have also previously been more cost-effective. This practice, known as *guhui fang* 骨灰房, becomes illegal under the new regulation (Art. 38). As in 2012,



Qingming 2025: Faithful from the Diocese of Tangshan (Hebei Province) visiting the graves at the Catholic cemetery in Beigang village. The diocese's bishops, priests, and sisters are buried there. Photograph: <https://xinde.org> April 7, 2025.

the right of ethnic minorities to their own burial customs is enshrined (Art. 9), although ecological and land-saving forms of burial should also be promoted here. Above all, the non-profit nature of the funeral industry is to be strengthened. In comparison to the 2012 regulation, this concern has been newly included in Art. 1 and is given top priority there. In particular, state funeral service providers with regulated prices are to become the norm. A number of prohibitions regulate pricing at non-governmental funeral service providers. Art. 14 stipulates that only the state may establish new funeral service providers, which are to be run as non-profit institutions; the establishment of new for-profit funeral businesses will be prohibited in the future. – In fact, in recent years, a number of factors, including the strict implementation of the burial policy itself, have led to speculation around graves, to abuse, and corruption. It remains to be seen how this strengthening of the state-sponsored funeral system will affect burial culture, especially in the religious sector. The date the new regulation came into force at the end of March was certainly not chosen by chance by the legislature, as April 5 (Qingming 清明) is the traditional day of remembrance of the dead, when graves are visited and cleaned at the beginning of spring. – It is also unclear how the implementation of the new regulation will be received. According to Chinese folk religious ideas, dealing with ancestors influences the living and the dead, so that funeral rites and the way graves are taken care of are of paramount importance. In April there were three days of protests against a government-planned crematorium in Shuikou (Guangdong). The legislature has made provisions for such cases: an extensive list of fines decrees how violations of the regulation are dealt with; officials can be subject to disciplinary action (Guojia xingzhengfagui ku 国家行政法规库 <https://xzfg.moj.gov.cn/front/law/detail?LawID=1788>; *The Guardian* March 31; *Bitter Winter* April 1). *kfr*

June 12, 2026:

Article on the “role of generative AI in the management of religious affairs” – including through the “standardization of religious information in large language models”

The National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) disseminated the article via its WeChat account on June 12. The authors, Sun Xiaoli and Wang Qilong, are researchers at the “Center for Intelligent Processing of Religious Information from Asia, Africa, and Europe” (亚非欧宗教信息智能计算中心), a think tank based at Southeast University in Nanjing. Its research covers two core areas: the regulation of religion-related information by internet companies and the practice of state religious administration. Of particular interest are the authors’ remarks regarding the field of “online religious information security.” Here, the center is systematically working “on the standardization of religious information in large language models to resolve current issues such as the inconsistent origins of training texts and the varying value systems of the models. The center is spearheading the creation of a high-quality, authoritative language corpus for the religious sector, based on a unified political stance and ideological orientation. It [...] is establishing a standardized, uniform, and clearly positioned reference question-and-answer system. In this way, erroneous historical, ethnic, and religious perspectives – as well as incorrect views imported from abroad – are corrected at the source, ensuring that the artificial intelligence delivers content regarding religious topics that complies with regulations. At the same time, core themes such as the ‘Sinicization’ of religions in China, the principles of religious independence, autonomy, and self-governance, and the relationship between state law and religious precepts are being integrated into the training system [...]” Internet companies are also to be enabled to better detect “illegal religious information.” Another key area of activity is the development of a support system for “smart governance.” This includes, among other things, a dynamically updated knowledge database to assist authorities in managing religious affairs, as well as intelligent models for practical application – such as establishing standardized legal bases, procedures, and penalties for “typical cases” like “illegal

religious activities, impostors posing as religious personnel, or non-compliant fundraising.” Finally, the center is also drafting specific administrative regulations regarding the use of generative AI within the religious sector. – The article appeared in the journal *Zhongguo zongjiao* 2026, no. 5, and on the NBRA’s WeChat account at https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/LskN010YIjdD9ym6b0O7_Q. *kwt*

June 26, 2026:

Short-video platforms WeChat Channels and Kuaishou announce a crackdown on “activities violating regulations under the guise of religion” – including the broadcasting of religious ceremonies

To “help streamers and users recognize the boundaries of permissible behavior,” a notice from WeChat Channels’s (微信视频号) Security Center presents “typical examples of such violations.” In doing so, the platform cites the provisions of the “Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services (MAIRIS, 2022),” the “Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel” (MARF, 2021), and the “Code of Conduct for Religious Personnel on the Internet” (2025). The notice argues that under the MAIRIS, no organization or individual is permitted to broadcast religious ceremonies – such as worship services, blessings, Dharma assemblies, or sacrificial rites – online, whether live or recorded. It further argues that under the MAIRIS and the MARF, it is strictly prohibited to impersonate religious clergy in livestreams without being recognized as such by the relevant religious umbrella organization and without being reported to the authorities for the record. Third, the notice maintains that under the MAIRIS, it is strictly prohibited to conduct commercial activities in the name of religion – such as livestream shopping, soliciting tips from users, or selling religious articles. Depending on the severity of the violation, the platform will take targeted, graduated measures, ranging from warnings, traffic throttling, livestream interruptions, and restrictions on livestreaming privileges to the deduction or deletion of credit points and even permanent account bans, the notice says. Users are encouraged to report violations to the platform. For each type of violation, the notice includes screenshots of typical examples (see above). – The notice from the short-video platform Kuaishou 快手 is similar in content.



Screenshot from a June 26 report by the WeChat Channels’s Security Center showing examples of “non-compliant” livestreams of religious ceremonies. The photographs appear to show (from left to right) a Daoist ceremony, a Buddhist monk giving a lecture (caption: “Inducing others to believe in a specific religion”), and a religious funeral service. Yellow warning banners across the photographs read *weigui* (违规), meaning “non-compliant” or “violating regulations.”

Both notices were posted on June 26, including on the website of the Chinese Buddhist Association (www.chinabuddhism.cn June 26). *kwt*

Daoism

April 13, 2026:

Hu Chenglin, President of the Shaanxi Provincial Daoist Association, stripped of his posts

In mid-April, Hu Chenglin 胡诚林, President of the Shaanxi Provincial Daoist Association and abbot of the Wanshou Baxian Temple 万寿八仙宫 in Xi'an, was removed from his key positions. He faces allegations of corrupt conduct, an illicit marriage involving a child, and abuse of office. The 52-year-old had last appeared in public on April 3. The case bears parallels to the events surrounding Shi Yongxin 释永信. The Buddhist abbot from Shaolin Monastery was also ousted in July 2025 following accusations of financial irregularities and illicit affairs (for the court verdict subsequently handed down, see the entry dated May 29, 2026, in the "Buddhism" section). Both locations are significant centers for their respective religions: the Shaolin Temple is considered the birthplace of Zen Buddhism in China, while Xi'an and the surrounding region are regarded as the spiritual home of Daoism. In Hu's case, the allegations originated with a whistleblower – an internet user operating under the name "Quanzhen Daoist Liu Yongheng." According to him, the accusations he first raised in October 2025 initially went unheeded because Hu enjoyed the protection of an official from the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Shaanxi Province. As the Hong Kong newspaper *Ming Pao* reported on May 4, the accuser was himself a prominent Daoist at the time of the disclosure; however, on April 10, he resigned from his position as a board member of the Xi'an Daoist Association and returned to lay life. – In fact, unlike the case of Shi Yongxin – where the ongoing investigations were promptly confirmed on the Shaolin Monastery's website – there is hardly any information regarding these events on official websites. Only the Wanshou Baxian Temple website lists the Daoist master's biography with the addition of "former" abbot; the Shaanxi Provincial Daoist Association website continues to display the same biography, dated 2015, unchanged. The website of the Chinese Daoist Association likewise contains no indication of the altered situation. If the allegations prove well-founded, this could indeed imply the involvement of local authorities in the case. New "Measures for the Administration of Financial Affairs of Sites for Religious Activities" have been in effect since 2022. Recently, there appears to have been an increase in financial inspections within the religious sector (<https://news.mingpao.com/pns/中/article/20260504/s00013/1777825448274>; *AsiaNews* May 16; *CNA* May 4). *kfr*

May 19, 2026:

Completion of the project "Collection of Visual Material on the Living Culture of Daoism"

On May 19, 2026, the official closing ceremony for this five-year project took place in Beijing. Attendees included Li Guangfu 李光富, Chairman of the Chinese Daoist Association, and the responsible representative from the United Front Work Department, alongside scholars and other representatives from temples and government agencies. The "Collection of Visual Material on the Living Culture of Daoism" project involved professional photography and videography aimed at documenting, preserving, and researching intangible Daoist cultural heritage. Led by the Guangdong Provincial Daoist Association, starting 2021, the project visited seventeen major temples, systematically recorded 72 Daoist rituals, and produced 65 documentary films based on this footage. Concurrently, the textual analysis

of 72 key Daoist texts was completed. The resulting compilation – comprising both textual records and visual material – allows, for the first time, a comparison between textual traditions and lived practice. The project is notable for its cross-regional scope, involving Daoist temples from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. The associated digital database is slated to be made accessible to interested parties via an online platform (www.taoist.org.cn May 25 [2 reports]). – Against the backdrop of efforts to “sinicize” religions, there is now extensive material documenting lived practice in selected temples. From the state’s perspective, this material can serve as a benchmark or highlight potential entry points for “Sinicization.” While the visual collection represents a significant addition to existing material on Daoism, the aspiration to define religious orthodoxy aligns with classical Chinese claims to authority. The project is part of decades-long, cross-border efforts to complete the orthodox Daoist Canon *Daozang* 道藏 – a collection of written texts dating back to the Ming Dynasty, with the final additions made under the Wanli Emperor. Known in Chinese as the Continuation of the Daoist Canon for China (*Zhonghua xudaozang* 中华续道藏), the project has so far produced the first of 100 planned volumes, according to the website of the Fung Ying Sin Koon Temple in Hong Kong (<https://zh.daoinfo.org/index.php?title=中華續道藏>). *kfr*

June 2, 2026:

World Federation of Daoism launches second training course on Daoist culture

In early June, 50 participants from Indonesia, Vietnam, Russia, France, Switzerland, Slovenia, and the USA gathered at the Wudang Mountains in Hubei – one of the most important sites of Daoism – for a training course on aspects of Daoist culture. In addition to representatives from the United Front and other government bodies, as well as religious representatives (including those from the Chinese Daoist Association), Diego Sanmiquel delivered a welcoming address on behalf of the participants. The training focused on Wudang Tai Chi, ritual ceremonies, and Daoist health practices. As the Chinese Daoist Association states on its website, the course also served to “further deepen the international Daoist community’s understanding of and identification with Chinese culture; to train internationally oriented Daoist talents capable of ‘mastering the classics, excelling in practice, and effectively conveying the teachings’; to strengthen the global cohesion of the World Federation of Daoism; and to promote the dissemination of Daoist culture abroad as well as cultural exchange” – in other words, to turn the international Daoist community into effective ambassadors for Chinese culture. International exchange programs of this kind are therefore always part of efforts to strengthen Chinese soft power abroad (www.taoist.org June 18). *kfr*

Buddhism

March 31, 2026:

Dalai Lama supports Pope Leo’s Palm Sunday appeal for peace

“I wholeheartedly endorse the powerful appeal for peace made by the Holy Father, Pope Leo, during his Palm Sunday Mass,” writes the Dalai Lama in a message published on his website. “His call for the laying down of arms and the renunciation of violence resonated profoundly with me, as it speaks to the very essence of what all major religions teach. Indeed, whether we look to Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism or any of the world’s great spiritual traditions, the message is fundamentally the same: love, compassion, tolerance, and self-discipline. Violence finds no true home in any of these teachings.” – In his Palm Sunday homily on March 29, Pope Leo XIV said: “[T]his is our God: Jesus,

King of Peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them, saying: ‘Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen: your hands are full of blood’ (Isaiah 1:15)” (www.dalailama.com/news/message; www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2026/documents/20260329-palme.html). *kwt*

April to June 2026:

Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) announces nine ordination certificate annulments

For approximately three years, the website of the CBA, the official umbrella organization of Buddhism in China, has regularly published announcements of the annulment of monastic certificates (*jiedie* 戒牒) of Buddhist monks – that is, laicizations – with the number increasing since 2025. The announcements, each signed by the CBA, are all worded identically. They begin by stating that the Buddhist Association of a specific province has requested the annulment. Then, they declare: “In accordance with the relevant regulations, our association revokes the ordination certificate of ...” The monk’s monastic name, secular name, and ordination certificate number are listed. Between the beginning of April and the end of June 2026, nine annulments of ordination certificates were announced on the website. No information is provided regarding the reasons for the annulments. In five cases, it was stated that the individual had “voluntarily relinquished their religious official identification.” This suggests that the other four cases were not voluntary (www.chinabuddhism.com.cn April 8, 13; June 11, 22, several cases per date). Ordination certificates are issued by the CBA and are the basis for reporting to the authorities for the record and subsequent issuance of the religious official identification card by the CBA. This religious official identification card, in turn, is a prerequisite for the individual to legally call themselves a monk under state law and to conduct religious activities. Revocation of the certificate can be a disciplinary measure, as happened in the case of former Abbot Shi Yongxin (see the entry of May 29, 2026, in this section). *kwt*

April 2, 2026:

Lingyin Temple in Hangzhou celebrates 1,700th anniversary

According to a report on the website of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA), Lingyin Temple 靈隱寺 was founded in 326 by the Indian monk Huili 慧理. Numerous Buddhist dignitaries, lay practitioners, and guests of honor gathered for the anniversary celebration of the Chan (Zen) temple. Attendees included the deputy head of the Zhejiang Provincial United Front Work Department and six Dharma masters from the CBA leadership team. Master Jianying 見穎, abbot of the Chong Tai Shan Chan Monastery in Taiwan, also attended (www.chinabuddhism.com.cn April 5). *kwt*

May 29, 2026:

Shi Yongxin, former abbot of the Shaolin Monastery, sentenced to a lengthy prison term

As reported that same day by the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) in a statement, the Xinxiang Intermediate People’s Court in Henan Province handed down the verdict in the case of Shi Yongxin 釋永信 on May 29. “We believe,” the CBA statement reads, “that Shi Yongxin (Liu Yingcheng 刘应成) – the former abbot of the Shaolin Temple – has only himself to blame for being sentenced to 24 years in prison for embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, and the crimes of accepting and offering bribes as a non-state functionary. This verdict reflects the principle that everyone is equal before the law and serves as a stern warning and reminder to the Buddhist community. As members of the Buddhist

community, we must cultivate a firm sense of national, civic, and legal consciousness, and deeply internalize the fact that no religion, place, or person stands above the law” (<https://chinabuddhism.com.cn/web/details/76733>). – On July 27, 2025, the Shaolin Monastery announced that several authorities had launched an investigation into the abbot. In addition to the aforementioned criminal offenses, Shi Yongxin was accused of serious violations of Buddhist monastic rules. According to some observers, his unauthorized visit to Pope Francis in February 2025 also played a role in his downfall. On July 28, 2025, the CBA revoked his ordination certificate, effectively laicizing him. He was formally arrested on November 16, 2025, and indicted on March 20, 2026. For background information, see also Carsten Krause and Leo Maximilian Koenig, “Shaolin im diskursiven Wandel der Zeiten: Machtkämpfe um die Kampfkunst” [Shaolin Amidst Changing Discourses: Power Struggles Over Martial Art], in: *China heute* 2025, no. 4, pp. 225–234, and 2026, no. 1, pp. 19–29 (in German). *kwt*

June 5, 2026:

Buddhist monk arrested after Tiananmen commemoration

Buddhist monk Shi Daoguo (born Zhang Chao) was arrested in Beijing early on the morning of June 5 by security police from Zaozhuang, Shandong, and taken to an undisclosed location. Originally from Shandong, he had taken a photograph in Tiananmen Square on June 4 and posted it, along with a poem, on his social media account. Shi Daoguo had previously been detained for a month in 2014 for warning petitioners in the capital about police raids. In 2019, he was again briefly detained following further social media activity – shortly before a planned trip abroad – and was subsequently denied a passport renewal. By his own account, Shi Daoguo has repeatedly but unsuccessfully sought recognition from the Buddhist Association; consequently, he is unable to join a monastery and lives as a wandering monk in forced isolation (*Bitter Winter* June 8; *UCAN* June 9). *kfr*

June 26, 2026:

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) releases a study on deaths in Tibet occurring in or after detention – half of the documented cases involve Buddhist monks

The report “Justice Denied – The Pattern of Deaths in and after Custody in Tibet” documents 16 cases of Tibetans who died between 2014 and 2026, either while in custody (ten cases) or immediately after their release. These cases occurred in the Tibet Autonomous Region and in Tibetan areas of Qinghai and Sichuan. The ICT identifies the following pattern: “Individuals are taken into custody, frequently without access to lawyers or family members, and held in conditions where there is little to no outside oversight. Accounts of abuse, ill-treatment, or denial of medical care emerge but are rarely examined independently. In some cases, people die in detention; in others, they are released only when their condition has already deteriorated beyond recovery.” Independent autopsies are reportedly impossible because family members are frequently denied access to the bodies. The individuals named in the report had engaged in no violent or criminal behavior; instead, they had dedicated themselves to preserving the Tibetan language and religious teachings, protecting the environment, or addressing community concerns, thus the report. – The report includes a list detailing the sixteen cases. It reveals that eight of the 16 individuals who died in or after custody between 2014 and 2026 were Buddhist monks or lamas. Regarding the two most recent cases: Tulku Hungkar Dorje was arrested in Ho Chi Minh City. He had reportedly been hiding in Vietnam after facing repeated interrogations and false accusations – specifically, refusing to host the official Panchen Lama, composing prayers for the Dalai Lama, and opposing Chinese policies through his educational work. According to the ICT, he was found dead in Chinese custody on March 28, 2025, following a covert joint operation by Chinese and Vietnamese authorities.

Samten, a 25-year-old monk from the Ditsa Geden Tashi Choedingling Monastery in Qinghai, died in police custody in December 2025. Authorities stated that he had “suddenly fallen ill.” His body was returned to the monastery with strict instructions not to release any information (<https://savetibet.org/justice-denied-the-pattern-of-deaths-in-and-after-custody-in-tibet>). *kwt*

Islam

April 9, 2026:

“Research Group on Quranic Thought” established

On April 9, the Chinese Quran Institute – the highest national religious training center for Muslims in the PRC – held a meeting to establish a “Research Group on Quranic Thought” (经学思想研究组). Yang Faming 杨发明, President of the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) and Rector of the Chinese Quran Institute, stated at the meeting that developing “Islamic Quranic scholarly thought” is a crucial component of systematically advancing the Sinicization of Islam and a key pathway for adapting Islam to socialist society. On the one hand, Islam must take deep root in Chinese culture; on the other, it must address the issues of the times and promote Islamic concepts of peace, unity, the middle path, and tolerance, he said. Yang Faming presented letters of appointment to the research group’s five academic leaders and its members. Research plans were presented, though the report does not mention their specific content. – Under the state’s Sinicization policy, all five religions are required to align the interpretation of their doctrines and regulations with the “developmental progress of contemporary China” and “China’s excellent traditional culture,” and to develop corresponding “theological thought” (the term used by Christians). Their canonical texts are also to be re-evaluated and, where necessary, revised. A new partial edition of the Quran, titled *Selected Verses of the Quran with a Short Commentary (Chinese Edition)* (古兰经节选简注 [中文版]), was already published in October 2024 (www.chinaislam.net.cn April 10; cf. *RCTC* 2025, no. 1, p. 7). *kwt*

May 8, 2026:

Chinese Consulate General in Jeddah warns against “illegal Hajj”

A notice from the Consulate General, posted on the website of the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA), states that Saudi police have recently stepped up enforcement actions against violations such as “illegal” Hajj activities in order to ensure safety and order during the ongoing Hajj season. The Chinese diplomatic missions in Saudi Arabia have already received requests for assistance from affected Chinese citizens, the notice says. Under Saudi regulations, only individuals holding a pilgrim visa are permitted to visit Mecca during the Hajj season. According to the notice, performing the Hajj without official authorization is considered an illegal act and is subject to severe penalties. The Consulate General urges Chinese citizens to comply with both Chinese and Saudi laws regarding the Hajj and to steer clear of “fraudulent Hajj organizers” and unlicensed intermediaries. – On the Chinese side, the CIA is the only state-authorized organizer of pilgrimages to Mecca for Chinese citizens. According to the CIA, over 10,000 pilgrims from the PRC participated in the Hajj in 2024. It did not publish figures for 2025 or 2026 (www.chinaislam.net.cn May 8; July 14, 2024). *kwt*

June 24, 2026:

Leadership and staff of the Chinese Islamic Association watch the livestream of a press conference on the new “Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress”

Just days before the new law was set to take effect on July 1, the State Council Information Office held a press conference regarding the said law on June 24 (see the related entry in the “General Politics” section). Executives and staff members from the Chinese Islamic Association and the Chinese Quran Institute gathered to watch the press conference together via livestream – an event documented with photographs in a report on the Chinese Islamic Association’s website. According to the report, there was a consensus that the new law represents a milestone in the history of the United Front and serves as a crucial legal measure for forging a shared sense of community of the Chinese nation (www.chinaislam.net.cn June 24). – Religious representatives are required to support state policy. China’s Muslims are particularly affected by the new law, as they all belong to ethnic minorities by definition; 46% of Muslims belong to the Chinese-speaking Hui ethnic group, while 43% are Uyghurs. *kwt*

Protestant Churches

May 6–8, 2026:

Third German-Chinese Interreligious Consultation in Berlin

The consultation focused on the theme “Religious Art & Architecture in Context.” The conference was organized and the invitation extended to the Chinese side under the leadership of Dr. Eckhard Zemmrich (Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany – EMW) and Rev. Ute Hedrich (Protestant Church in Germany – EKD). The umbrella organizations of the Protestant Church in China – the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (CCC/TSPM) – were closely involved in the conceptualization and coordination of the program. The Chinese delegation comprised 12 participants, including five representatives from the CCC/TSPM; one representative each from Islam, Buddhism, and Catholicism in China; a Christian paper-cutting artist; an architect; a scholar of religious studies; and a government official. A total of 13 presentations – delivered alternately by Chinese and German speakers – were organized into thematic panels covering areas such as architecture, music, and calligraphy. The event was deemed a great success by all parties, and a clear intention was expressed to continue the format. *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

Mid-May 2026:

Complete demolition of Yayang Church in Wenzhou

Following coercive measures taken against the church in December and the removal of the cross from the church tower in January (cf. *RCTC* 2026, no. 2, p. 9), the entire church was razed to the ground in mid-May using excavators and heavy machinery. At the same time, reports emerged of detentions extending beyond the local area, strict surveillance of the congregation, and information blockades. The large building was considered a landmark of Yayang in Taishun County, within the Wenzhou administrative area. The congregation follows the tradition of the “Little Flock” movement (*juhuichu* 聚会处) founded by Watchman Nee and is classified as an unregistered church. The conflict escalated following protests against the intrusion of government officials who, in June 2025, forcibly installed flagpoles on the church grounds to fly the national flag. Believers viewed this as an assault on the purity of their faith (www.chinaaid.net/2026/05/blog-post_147.html). *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

May 19–20, 2026:

The China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (CCC/TSPM) prepare new publications

At the third meeting of the national committee dedicated to advancing the Sinicization of the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (CCC/TSPM) – held on May 19 and 20 in Yangquan, Shanxi Province – TSPM General Secretary Gu Mengfei identified two new publications as key projects for promoting Sinicization within the Protestant church in China. The books, titled “Questions and Answers on the Sinicization of Christianity” (基督教中国化问答) and “Reader on the Sinicization of Christianity” (基督教中国化读本), must be accessible and practical, and must stand the test of time. Crucial to this effort, thus Gu Mengfei, is ensuring a theoretically sound structure built upon a foundation of political correctness and China’s rich cultural heritage, while also incorporating the practical experiences of grassroots churches. Pastor Yue Qinghua, the committee’s chairperson, presided over the meeting and reported on the current status of preparations and key progress made in refining the manuscripts (www.ccctspm.org May 25; *Bitter Winter* June 17). *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

May 25 to June 5, 2026:

Amity Foundation’s “Young Envoys for Amity and Hope” (YEAH) program

From May 25 to June 5, 13 young adults from Germany, Norway, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, USA, and Canada participated in the newly designed “Young Envoys for Amity and Hope” (YEAH) program. Criteria for participation in this two-week program on social development included a generally positive attitude toward China and professional experience in the social sector. The group visited the Amity Foundation headquarters in Nanjing as well as facilities for the elderly, those requiring long-term care, and people with disabilities; they also toured the Amity Printing Press and two other local enterprises. One day was dedicated to visiting the John Rabe House and the Memorial Hall for the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre of 1937. Amity contextualized these experiences by sharing a message with the participants about the importance of peace and reconciliation in today’s world – a discussion that also touched upon Amity’s long-standing youth exchange program with Japan. The group spent two days at Nanjing Normal University, where – in addition to a hands-on workshop with an art class – they gained insight into the students’ daily lives. Volunteers from Nanjing Normal University supported the YEAH program, taking turns accompanying the group to the various sites and activities. Although the German participants would have welcomed more contact with Chinese peers and opportunities for critical dialogue, they feel deeply enriched by the experience and are, overall, grateful and positively impressed by the program. *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

Catholic Church

April 2, 2026:

Beijing newspaper reveals corruption scandal in Hunan’s Catholic Church – Bishop Qu Ailin and two heads of Catholic bodies sentenced to prison

Xinjingbao 新京报 (Beijing News) outlines the circumstances without naming the Catholic officials involved; their identities became known through other sources (including *AsiaNews*). They are Bishop

Methodius Qu Ailin of Hunan and the heads of the province's two official Catholic governing bodies (the so-called "Two Associations"): Catholic layman Hu Yali, chairman of the Patriotic Association, and Father Li Hongwei, head of the Commission for Church Affairs. (The province's nine former dioceses had already been merged into the "Diocese of Hunan" by the official Church in 1999.) – According to the *Xinjingbao* report, the alleged mastermind was a cadre named Ding. He had worked at a "Service Center for Religious Organizations" under the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Hunan Province before being seconded to Hunan's Catholic "Two Associations" in 2003, eventually becoming their deputy secretary-general (!). In 2016, Ding reportedly induced the Hunan Church to secretly sell a valuable property it owned in Wuhan (Hubei) at a price far below market value; through the use of dual sales contracts, he allegedly embezzled a large sum of money. However, a second case appears to have been decisive in the conviction of the three Church representatives: In 2019, the relevant authority in Shanghai's Yangpu District signed expropriation and compensation agreements with the Hunan Catholic Church regarding two Church-owned properties. At that time – according to *Xinjingbao*, citing the court verdict – Ding was once again the official in charge of the matter. He reportedly agreed with the three Church representatives to deposit only one compensation sum (70.67 million Yuan) into Church accounts and to divide the second sum (24.81 million Yuan) among themselves. It is impossible to verify whether all details of the report are accurate. According to *Xinjingbao*, on November 14, 2025, the People's Court of Kaifu District, Changsha City, sentenced the three Church representatives to prison terms and fines for the crime of embezzlement in office (职务侵占罪). Other sources indicate that Bishop Qu Ailin and Father Li Hongwei were each sentenced to six years in prison, while the layman Hu Yali received a seven-year sentence. Official Ding received an eight-year prison sentence. Previously, in September 2025, Bishop Qu was reportedly stripped of his episcopal office by the national Catholic governing bodies (N.B.: under canon law, the Pope is the authority responsible for the dismissal of bishops). – In light of the question of how two clerics and a theologically educated layman could turn into "people like Shi Yongxin," a Catholic blogger named Xiu Chengtie advises clergy to strictly separate Church finances from personal finances. He also asks: "Why must all important matters concerning Church property be handled by people from the Religious Affairs Administration? Do we not have our own people?" (<https://m.bjnews.com.cn/detail/1775088542168261.html>; <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/2ihs9TZkjkLLzf8ChmYFzQ>; *AsiaNews* April 20). *kwt*

April 4, 2026:

Baptisms in many Catholic communities across China during the Easter Vigil – 98 baptisms at Shanghai Cathedral

98 adults were baptized during the Easter Vigil liturgy at St. Ignatius Cathedral in Shanghai's Xujiahui district (<https://xinde.org> April 9). Holy Week and Easter were celebrated with great solemnity also in other parts of China, as shown by the photos from Shijiazhuang at the top of next page. *kwt*

April 15, 2026:

Human Rights Watch releases report: "China: Pressure on Catholics Escalates. Vatican Agreement with Beijing on Bishops Facilitates Crackdown"

The report covers the following topics: government control over religions; the "Sinicization" of Catholicism; the crackdown on the underground Catholic Church; intensified ideological control; increasing surveillance and restrictions on religious activities; and restrictions on clergy travel and foreign contacts. The report contains extensive details and links. According to the New York-based human rights organization, the 2018 Sino-Vatican agreement has helped the Chinese government pressure under-



Cathedral of Shijiazhuang (Hebei Province), 2026:
Eucharistic Adoration on Holy Thursday (top) and the blessing of baptismal water during the Easter Vigil (bottom).
Photographs: <https://xinde.org> April 8.



ground Catholic communities to join the official Church. The report can be found at: www.hrw.org/news/2026/04/15/china-pressure-on-catholics-escalates. *kwt*

April 25, 2026:

Shanghai Catholic Intelligentsia Association celebrates 40th anniversary

The association – also known as the Shanghai Catholic Intellectuals Association (SCIA, *Shanghai shi Tianzhujiao zhishifenzi lianyihui* 上海市天主教知识分子联谊会) – was founded on June 27, 1986, by the then-Bishop of Shanghai, Dr. Aloysius Lin Luxian, S.J. Catholic laypeople sought to become more actively involved in social spheres on a voluntary basis. From the outset, the group included doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, and others, among them many retirees. Within eight months, the association already counted 350 members. At that time, one-third of the members came from the medical field, offering various services in Shanghai parishes, particularly for the elderly. – According to the website of the Shanghai Diocese, the association currently has 600 members. On May 30, for instance, the association – in collaboration with the diocesan Guangqi Social Service Center – or-

ganized a medical consultation session and health education lectures. More than twenty families with mentally disabled children received professional medical advice and scientifically grounded guidance on healthcare. According to an SCIA report also published in *Xinde*, the SCIA board held a meeting on April 25, during which also the upcoming anniversary celebrations were discussed. The report, which employs considerable political terminology, also addresses the Sinicization of Catholicism in China and the cultivation of the “brand” known as “Talking about the Dao by the Sea.” In the near future, the association intends to focus its efforts primarily on cultural integration, the expansion of its characteristic services – such as medical care –, and the promotion of Church administration (*AsiaNews* May 24; <https://shtzjlh.org> June 3; <https://xinde.org> April 29; interview regarding the early days: https://hsstudyc.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/T039_13.pdf; brief information on the SCIA: <https://shtzjlh.org/tianzhujiaozhishifenzilianyihui.html>). *kf*

April 29, 2026:

Wuhan Catholic leadership bodies hold training on financial management

To raise the standard of financial management and in line with the requirements of comprehensive inspection and rectification work, Wuhan’s Catholic “Two Associations” (the Patriotic Association and the Commission for Church Affairs) conducted a training session on financial management of religious activity venues. Parish leaders and financial administrators – totaling around 50 people – participated. In his opening address, Bishop Cui Qingqi of Wuhan stated that financial integrity is essential to the purity of the Church and that high priority must be placed on proper financial management. The training was led by experts and based on the “Accounting System for Civil Non-Profit Organizations”; it concluded with an examination (<https://xinde.org> May 8). – Intensified financial inspections within the religious sector have been taking place for some time. *kwt*

April 30, 2026:

Missions Etrangères de Paris (MEP) launch extensive China-related materials on their web portal

The Institut de recherche France-Asie (irfa) in Paris is tasked with making accessible the nearly four-hundred-year history of the Missions Etrangères de Paris (MEP) in Asia – a collection comprising over 800 linear meters of archival records. MEP missionaries remain active in fifteen countries across the continent today, including Taiwan. In addition to an on-site library, the institute maintains a web portal that is continuously updated. At <https://irfa.paris/>, users can identify archival materials, consult library catalogs, and study digitized documents. In late April, extensive information regarding irfa’s China resources was made available on the portal (<https://irfa.paris/la-mission-en-chine/>). The MEP were active in China from 1684 to 1955; they worked in Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangdong, Guangxi, Tibet, and what was then Manchuria, and were entrusted with numerous dioceses. Resources accessible online include digitized writings and maps, as well as historical information on individual missionaries and dioceses. One of the best-known modern-era MEP missionaries to China is Fr. Jean Charbonnier MEP (1932–2023; see obituary in *China heute* 2023, no. 3, pp. 152–154 (in German); *AsiaNews* May 6). *kfr*

May 14, 2026:

Official Catholic bodies in Inner Mongolia propagate the new “Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress” in Hohhot

In front of the main entrance to the Catholic cathedral in Hohhot, the Inner Mongolia Catholic Patriotic Association and the Commission for Church Affairs – together with the Hohhot City Catholic Patriotic Association – conducted an awareness-raising campaign regarding state policy on ethnic groups and the new “Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity.” Brochures containing the text of the law and other informational materials were distributed. According to the report, the cathedral was encouraged to participate actively in the initiative. The stated goal of the campaign was to ensure that “forging a sense of community of the Chinese nation permeates all work related to Catholicism” and that the promotion of ethnic policy reaches “parishes, the mass of believers, and everyday life” (www.chinacatholic.cn May 15). – The state expects religions to actively support its policies. The majority of Catholics in Inner Mongolia are Han Chinese. There have long been reports that the Mongolian language in Inner Mongolia is coming under increasing pressure due to ethnic policies – including the policy of Chinese-language kindergartens (cf. *RCTC* 2021, no. 4, p. 3). *kwt*

May 28, 2026:

National Catholic governing bodies publish “Code of Conduct for Catholic Religious Personnel” and regulations regarding the appointment of parish clergy

Both documents were adopted on December 16, 2025, by the standing committees of the Chinese Catholic “One Association and One Conference” (i.e., the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference), but have only now been posted on the bodies’ joint website. The “Code of Conduct for Catholic Religious Personnel” (中国天主教教职人员行为规范) bears a distinctly political stamp and aims to counter dual loyalties. This is clearly evident in Article 6: “They must not be political ‘two-faced people’ who speak one way outwardly but differently behind people’s backs [...] and who, while appearing submissive, are inwardly defiant or even secretly collude with foreign forces.” The “Measures for the Appointment of Senior Religious Personnel at Catholic Sites for Religious Activities” (中国天主教活动场所主要教职任职管理办法) include, among other things, a limit on the tenure of head parish priests – a rule that has applied since December 2025 to leading religious personnel at venues of all five recognized religions (cf. *RCTC* 2026, no. 2, p. 4). The provisions concerning the safekeeping of travel documents for Catholic religious personnel – adopted at the same meeting (German translation in *China heute* 2026, no. 1, pp. 16–18) – still do not appear on the website, though they were previously “leaked” by ChinaAid and *Radio Free Asia*. It appears that yet another new document exists: A report in *Xinde* regarding a training session for religious personnel in the Diocese of Xi’an in late May 2026 mentions the “Notice on Strengthening the Standardized Administration of Small Groups in Church Congregations” (关于加强教堂内部小组规范管理的通知), adopted by the “One Association and One Conference.” The title is reminiscent of the restrictive “Measures for the Administration of Group Activities in Chinese Protestant Sites” (German translation in *China heute* 2026, no. 1, pp. 15–16 (texts of the first two documents mentioned can be found at www.chinacatholic.cn/ccic/report/2605/0089-1.htm and www.chinacatholic.cn/ccic/report/2605/0088-1.htm; <https://xinde.org> June 9). *kwt*

Before June 19, 2026:

Catholic community activities for the Dragon Boat Festival

As part of the policy of Sinicization, Catholic and Protestant Christians are encouraged to increasingly celebrate traditional Chinese festivals – if they have not already been doing so. For the Dragon Boat Festival (Duanwujie 端午节), which fell on June 19 in 2026, *zongzi* 粽子 (sticky rice wrapped in reed leaves) are traditionally prepared and eaten in China. On June 17, the Catholic parish in the international trading city of Yiwu, Zhejiang, hosted a gathering for the Dragon Boat Festival for both Chinese and foreign believers, themed “The Aroma of *zongzi* Spreads Warmth – The Lord’s Love Fills All Continents.” Many Catholics from other Chinese provinces also took part. Father Chang introduced the Dragon Boat Festival and gave a blessing; everyone sang the Lord’s Prayer. Then, under the guidance of knowledgeable locals, the group began wrapping *zongzi* together, which were subsequently eaten. Afterward, there was celebration and singing; an Indian man spontaneously danced to a song performed by a Colombian man. The atmosphere was described as relaxed, lively, and enthusiastic. This international celebration is particularly noteworthy because, according to state regulations, Christian communities for foreigners are generally off-limits to Chinese citizens; yet, a joint cultural activity of this kind is permitted. – At the Xijianhe parish in the Diocese of Taiyuan, volunteers (predominantly women) worked together to make *zongzi* to deliver to elderly people living alone – an initiative the parish has reportedly carried out for decades. – In Shanghai, five events featuring diverse presentations of traditional culture took place between June 12 and 18 across the diocese’s five deaneries, under the guidance of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau of Shanghai City. Bishop Shen Bin stated that



“The Aroma of *zongzi* Spreads Warmth – The Lord’s Love Fills All Continents”: Under this motto, the Catholic parish in the trading city of Yiwu hosted an international gathering featuring the communal making of *zongzi* for the 2026 Dragon Boat Festival.
Photo: <https://xinde.org> June 22.

such cultural activities for the Dragon Boat Festival are “a concrete practice for integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into the life of faith and advancing the Sinicization of Catholicism in our country” (<https://xinde.org> June 17, 22, 23). *kwt*

Sino-Vatican Relations

April 27, 2026:

Egyptian political scientist: “Chinese Intelligence Bureau 9 monitors the Vatican using technical and human resources”

Dr. Nadia Helmy provides a rare insight into the operations of Chinese intelligence agencies abroad in an article for *Modern Diplomacy*. The author is a professor of political science at Beni Suef University in Egypt. As she explains, the so-called Bureau 9 (referred to in English as Bureau 9, Ninth Bureau, or Bureau IX) of the Ministry of State Security is responsible for matters concerning the Catholic Church. Within China, the bureau monitors the Catholic clergy and exerts influence on individuals and processes to ensure the implementation of state objectives. Outside China, the bureau recruits personnel to monitor the Vatican and has been linked to cyberattacks against the Vatican and other Catholic organizations. Bureau 9 – also known as the Anti-Defection and Counter-Surveillance Bureau – protects Chinese organizations and interests abroad. “It utilizes both technical and human resources to monitor the Vatican as a foreign force interfering in internal affairs, with a particular focus on severing the connection between Chinese Catholics, Taiwanese Catholics, and the authority of the Pope in the Vatican,” Helmy concludes. However, as she notes in the same article, the Vatican also possesses diplomatic and intelligence channels. These date back to a security apparatus established in 1566, whose counter-surveillance unit – founded in 1913 – operates under the name Sodalitium Planum. The primary aim of the Vatican’s efforts – in which the Order of Malta, with its international contacts, plays a key role – is to gather information on developments affecting the Church’s interests (<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2026/04/27/the-role-of-the-bureau-9-of-the-chinese-mss-in-monitoring-vatican-activities-in-taiwan/>). *kfr*

May 8, 2026:

One year of Pope Leo XIV: Taiwanese journalist on delegation visits between China and the Vatican, and China’s perspective on Pope Leo and President Trump

Cheng Chieh-Yi 鄭傑憶, a journalist from Taiwan who earned her doctorate at Sapienza University in Rome, regularly writes from Italy for Taiwanese and other media outlets, covering topics such as Vatican affairs. Her report published in *Jingbao* on May 7 contains information that had not previously been made public and cannot be independently verified in detail; however, in the assessment of the author of this entry (*kwt*), the key details should be largely accurate. According to Cheng, a delegation from Beijing – where the election of an American as Pope on May 8, 2025, had caused deep shock – visited the Vatican in June 2025 to gauge the character of Leo XIV. – Between June and December 2025, arrangements coordinated between China and the Vatican were implemented regarding several episcopal appointments in Fuzhou, Zhangjiakou, Xinxiang, and Shanghai, including the establishment of the new Diocese of Zhangjiakou. – Then, in March 2026, according to Cheng, a Vatican delegation traveled to Beijing. The delegation was led by Msgr. Mihăiță Blaj, who has served as undersecretary of the Section for Relations with States and International Organizations with the Vatican’s Secretariat of

State since November 2025. According to Cheng, discussions covered filling the vacant See of Haimen (vacant since Bishop Shen Bin was transferred to Shanghai in 2023), as well as the appointment of six additional bishops and the reorganization of dioceses. Cheng writes that the delegation also traveled to Xi'an, where they met with the bishop and members of the faithful. Cheng further claims that Robert Prevost traveled to China six times [(!) this high figure is new and unconfirmed] before becoming Pope and is intimately familiar with the situation of the Church there. According to Cheng, China is gradually shedding its reservations regarding Pope Leo. She argues that, among other things, President Trump's attacks on Leo – and the latter's unflinching response – made it clear to the Chinese leadership that the American Pope is not subject to the dictates of the American President (*Jingbao* 鏡報 [Taiwan] May 7, www.mirrordaily.news/story/59001). – Egyptian political scientist Dr. Nadia Helmy even argued that Beijing is exploiting the tensions between President Trump and Pope Leo for propaganda purposes, using them to demonstrate that Western values are not monolithic and “that current US policy is morally isolated, even from the most important Christian institution in the world” (*Modern Diplomacy* April 19; regarding Helmy, see the entry from April 27, 2026, in this section). *kwt*

May 24, 2026:

Pope Leo XIV speaks on the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China

At the conclusion of the *Regina Caeli* prayer on Pentecost Sunday in St. Peter's Square, Pope Leo said: “Today marks the Day of Prayer for the Church in China, which occurs on the feast day of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians. She is venerated with great devotion at the Sheshan Shrine in Shanghai. Let us join our prayers with those of Chinese Catholics as a sign of our closeness to them and their communion with the universal Church and with the Successor of Peter. May the intercession of the Queen of Heaven obtain for the community of believers in China the grace of unity and grant them the strength to bear witness to the Gospel in their daily struggles, so that they may be seeds of hope and peace. In particular, I pray for the eternal rest of the victims of the accident that occurred recently in a mine in northern China.” (www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/angelus/2026/documents/20260524-regina-caeli.html). – On May 24, at the Basilica of Sheshan in Shanghai, the Diocese of Shanghai celebrated the Feast of Mary, Help of Christians, and Pentecost with a Mass presided over by Bishop Shen Bin (<https://xinde.org> May 26). *kwt*

Hong Kong

May 31, 2026:

Church in Hong Kong launches systematic pastoral care in Mandarin for migrants from the mainland

On May 31, the Diocese of Hong Kong launched a systematic pastoral care and evangelization program for migrants from mainland China. Representatives from sixteen parishes and Church groups attended the opening Mass, which was led by Cardinal Chow and conducted in Mandarin. Plans are in place to offer services in Mandarin (*putonghua*) within this predominantly Cantonese-speaking metropolis. Since the beginning of the year, Fr. Bruno Lepeu M.E.P. and Fr. Andrew Wang S.V.D. have been leading a related project designed to cover all key areas of pastoral care for migrants through six committees: within deaneries, in schools, for youth, in theological training, for evangelization, and for the further development of pastoral care through research. Particular emphasis is being placed on strengthening

coordination between parishes and Catholic schools, which serve as a primary point of contact in the new city for many parents with a migrant background. Parishes are also being encouraged to offer evangelization activities in *putonghua*. Some parishes already provide parental counseling, Cantonese lessons, introductory faith courses, and Church services in Mandarin. As Fr. Lepeu explained to the *Sunday Examiner*, Hong Kong parishes can also learn from the newcomers – for instance, the custom of the congregation gathering socially after Mass. The steady influx of people from the mainland – whether for study, skilled worker programs, or family reunification – has led to an increasingly visible presence of Mandarin in daily life in Hong Kong. However, for many Hong Kongers, the Cantonese language is an expression of their own cultural and political independence; they often speak Mandarin poorly or are reluctant to use it. Writing in the *Sunday Examiner*, Fr. Lepeu acknowledges that the initiative is meeting with some hesitation among local believers, but emphasizes how important it is for immigrants to be able to open up in their native language. “It does not matter if our *putonghua* is not perfect; they will still be touched to see our desire to connect with them,” he said (*Sunday Examiner* June 5, 12). *kfr*

June 1–5, 2026:

Cardinal Chow leads delegation to Sichuan – Sinicization of religions is a key topic

An eleven-member delegation from the Diocese of Hong Kong visited Sichuan Province from June 1 to 5. In addition to diocesan leaders, the delegation included priests, religious, and Susanna Ching, President of the Hong Kong Central Council of Catholic Laity. The itinerary included visits to the dioceses of Chengdu, Yibin, and Leshan, as well as meetings with two other bishops from the Nanchong and Xichang dioceses. All participants emphasized that the trip had deepened their understanding of the local ecclesiastical situation. By the end of the journey, the delegates were particularly impressed by their visit to the seminary in Sichuan, which they viewed as a living witness to faith and a sign of hope for the Chinese Church. The topic of the Sinicization of religions also played a role during the trip. Hong Kong’s Vicar General Peter Choy highlighted the potential of Sinicization for a form of evangelization that is inculturated and adapted to contemporary society. Father Joseph Liu, the diocese’s deputy procurator, expressed similar sentiments: “We hope the Church can cultivate a spirit of synodality while integrating with Chinese culture. The Sinicisation of religion can be explored from various aspects, such as music, religious clothing and architecture, so as to enrich our faith.” Lay representative Susanna Ching described her impressions of wall displays that juxtaposed biblical passages with core socialist values. “This was the first time I had seen this, but whether the two can express the same meaning, and whether our understanding is consistent, remains to be investigated.” (*Sunday Examiner* June 11). *kfr*

June 23, 2026:

Bishops from Hong Kong and Macau on *ad limina* visit to the Vatican

Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau-yan and Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing from Hong Kong, along with Bishop Stephen Lee Bun-sang from Macau, held *ad limina* talks at the Vatican in June. This form of personal reporting by bishops to the Pope regarding the situation in their dioceses generally takes place every five years. Against the backdrop of Sino-Vatican relations, the talks took on added significance as an expression of the bond between the Catholic Church in China and the universal Church; given the connections between Hong Kong and mainland China, the visit also provided an opportunity to discuss the state of the Church in the wider region. The visit coincided with anniversary years for

both dioceses, which are currently marking eighty years (Hong Kong) and 450 years (Macau) of existence. Reflecting on this heritage, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing emphasized the importance of a missionary spirit in order to become bearers of hope for future generations in his diocese. The number of Christians in Hong Kong has been rising for years, with some of this growth attributed to migration. While the number of Catholics in the metropolis is growing slowly, the number of Protestants there has tripled in just under twenty years (*Vatican News* June 23). *kfr*

Taiwan

April 22, 2026:

Bishops from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau meet in Taipei – Cardinal Chow (Hong Kong) counters accusations of being instrumentalized by Beijing

On April 22, Cardinal Stephen Chow and Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha from Hong Kong, Bishop Stephen Lee from Macau, and Bishop Simon Poh from Malaysia (who is of Chinese descent) visited the Archdiocese of Taipei. After celebrating a joint Mass in the morning, the guests met in the evening with eight Taiwanese bishops. Archbishop Thomas Chung An-Zu stated that this was the largest gathering of bishops from the Chinese-speaking world to date. Cardinal Chow from Hong Kong spoke about the Vatican's hopes for the meeting. Future gatherings of this kind are intended to take place annually at rotating locations. Expectations are that exchanges between Chinese bishops will be strengthened, with the hope that bishops from mainland China might also be able to participate one day (Archdiocese of Taipei YouTube video, April 22: www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-5YIguCgYU; Archdiocese of Taipei Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/s.ca.tpe/posts/1273278161669513/>). – Subsequently, Cardinal Chow's trip drew heavy criticism on social media. In response, the bishop in the *Sunday Examiner* (Hong Kong) lamented the increasing politicization, explaining that such meetings serve the purpose of normal exchange and do not constitute instrumentalization by mainland China; unity, he noted, should not be equated with uniformity (*Sunday Examiner* June 5). *kfr*

May 18, 2026:

60 Years of Foguangshan: Delegation from the Chinese Buddhist Association visits Taiwan for celebrations and exchange

In May, the Foguangshan 佛光山 Buddhist monastery marked the 60th anniversary of its founding. The headquarters of the monastery founded by Hsing Yun (Xingyun 星雲, 1927–2023) is located near Kaohsiung, Taiwan. As a representative of Humanistic Buddhism, characterized by its outward-looking approach and social engagement, Foguangshan maintains a significant presence in Taiwanese society, and stands as one of the island's largest social service providers. Branches of the mother temple exist worldwide, including in Berlin. At the invitation of the United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghua (中华人间佛教联合总会), five senior monks from the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) – including its president, Yanjue – attended the anniversary celebrations to pay their respects to Hsing Yun and his life's work. The delegation from mainland China used the visit to hold further discussions with key Buddhist figures and organizations in Taiwan, including the United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghu, the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (Taiwan) (台湾中国佛教会), the Tzu Chi Foundation (慈济慈善事业基金会), and a number of other prominent temples. Topics of discussion included the potential to deepen practical cooperation in areas such as

Buddhist education, culture, and monastic training, as well as ways to foster exchange between younger and mid-career monks from both sides (www.chinabuddhism.com.cn May 18). – Regarding Foguangshan, see also Esther-Maria Guggenmos's obituary of Abbot Hsing Yun in *China heute* 2023, no. 2, pp. 109–111 (in German). *kfr*

Authors' Abbreviations:

Katharina Feith (*kf*)

Isabel Freemann, China InfoStelle

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber (*kwt*)

Katrin Fiedler (*kfr*)

This “News Update” was first published in *China heute* 2026, no. 2, pp. 74–85 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the “News Update” refer to the year 2026.

In Dialogue about Religious Art and Architecture in Germany and China – The Third German–Chinese Interreligious Consultation, Berlin, May 6–8, 2026

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Translated by Anna Clart

Blessed and thankful – that’s how the participants of the Third Interreligious Consultation parted ways on the 8th of May. The event was celebrated as a great success from all sides, with the intention of continuing this format in the future clearly expressed. Rev. Dr. Eckhard Zemmrich, from the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW), and Rev. Ute Hedrich, from the Protestant Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland – EKD), had directed the conference’s preparation and issued the invitation to the Chinese side. The umbrella organizations of the Protestant church in China, the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), from the beginning of the planning were closely involved in the conception and talks about the contents of the consultation.

Background

The National Religious Affairs Administration had supported the idea of a first interreligious consultation in Hamburg and Berlin, which was achieved in 2016. This was sparked by the observation that German churches were offering services to Muslim refugees and the question of how well different religions were coexisting in Germany, as well as by a 2015 conversation that took place in Berlin, between the person then serving as the EMW’s Asia desk officer and an official of the National Religious Affairs Administration. For this first consultation, the Chinese delegation comprised 21 participants: six representatives of the National Religious Affairs Administration, five from CCC/TSPM, three Catholics, five Muslims, and two religious studies scholars. After the positive experiences of the first consultation, CCC/TSPM issued a reciprocal invitation to Shanghai in 2018; alongside representatives of the EKD and EMW, the sixteen people who accepted included a series of religious studies scholars as well as the director of the China-Zentrum, two German Muslims, and a member of the German Foreign Office. This second consultation was placed under the motto “Different Religions – A Shared Future.” A planned third consultation, which was to take place in Germany, was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year’s successful continuation of these events – after staff changes, religious-political shifts in China, a more critical image of China in Germany, and generally scarcer resources



Brandenburg Gate on bamboo pillars: This logo, designed especially for the Third German–Chinese Interreligious Consultation, was warmly received by the Chinese guests.

RELIGIOUS ART & ARCHITECTURE
IN CONTEXT

境遇中的宗教艺术与建筑

DRITTE DEUTSCH-CHINESISCHE
INTERRELIGIÖSE KONSULTATION

第三次德中跨宗教对话会

– is a vital sign of the importance of friendly exchange and the continuation of official relations in the religious field between both countries. Financially, the EKD's and EMW's contributions were generously supplemented by the German Bishops' Conference and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany; the staff involved came, among other places, from the China-Zentrum and the China InfoStelle. The delegation included five representatives of CCC/TSPM, one representative of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, a Deputy President of the Chinese Buddhist Association, a representative of the Chinese Islamic Association, a religious studies scholar, and an official of the United Front Department responsible for religious-political subjects. Two further participants were a female Protestant architect and a Protestant papercutting artist. Would all 12 Chinese participants manage to receive their visas in time? The surrounding trepidation felt like it lasted to the very last day. Yet the joy when it all worked out was so much the greater.

Program of the Consultation in Berlin

“Religious Art and Architecture in Context” – the consultation's subject matter offered a wealth of starting points that could be experienced in a sensory manner. A packed visitation schedule led into and through the Berlin Cathedral, the new synagogue, the House of One project, St. Hedwig's Cathedral, the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab Mosque, and up to the



The Chinese delegation with some of the German participants in front of the Brandenburg Gate.
Photograph: China-Zentrum Archive.

Brandenburg Gate. The shared coach trips, the tours tailored to the group, and the impressive locations themselves proved to be more than the ideal practical introduction to the subject: They were also experiences everyone shared as spectators, listeners, and learners. A relaxed and trusting atmosphere was thus established quickly. The equally confident and charming interpreter seemed to enjoy the visits too and played a large role in bringing the contents across in a linguistically and culturally sensitive way. An organ concert played especially for the consultation in the Berlin Cathedral immediately entranced the participants into devout silence; when improvisations on the Chinese *sheng* were added to the mix, the enthusiasm was complete.

The series of thirteen lectures in total, given alternately by Chinese and German speakers, was held in blocks, grouped around themes like architecture, music, or calligraphy. All lectures shared a relevance to current events. The Chinese side very clearly demonstrated the religious-political mission of Sinicization, enhancing and promoting traditional Chinese culture. The German side was focused on the treatment of history, the dwindling of church congregations, and the struggle to offer both true and contemporary messages. The various lectures in the architecture panel will now be given for illustrative purposes: First, monk Ven. Shi Xinguang discussed the spiritual path captured in a Buddhist monastery's architecture, sketched and laid out in the different stations encoun-



Visit to the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab Mosque in Berlin: Delegation member Ma Weiwei of the Chinese Islamic Association (right) gifted the mosque, represented by the community's head (left), a self-written calligraphy on the subject of the "middle way." In the center stands the delegation's leader, Pastor Xu Xiaohong. Photograph: China-Zentrum Archive.

tered while walking through the complex. Dr. Tan Lizhu, Secretary General of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, showed a wealth of images of Catholic churches built in the traditional Chinese manner. Prof. Dr. Thorsten Klooster provided insights into the transformation of those churches that are no longer used as sacral spaces. Architect Ms. Chen Siyuan laid out her project, completed in 2005, of a technically ultra-modern Protestant church with 5,000 seats – the Chong Yi Church of Hangzhou. Finally, Dr. Konstantin Manthey gave an overview of the historical roots underlying the creation of Berlin's religious buildings, some of which we had already visited.

The Muslim calligrapher Shahid Alam, who lives in Germany, enchanted the participants with a demonstration in which he expressed his faith through the artful placement of lines and dots of the Arabic script; they connect and solidify towards the earth, while stretching yearningly upwards and dissolving towards the heavens. Prof. Dr. Johann Hinrich Claussen, Commissioner of Cultural Affairs of the EKD, presented artistic interventions made in various Berlin churches to invite his audience to engage in philosophical contemplations and critical self-reflection.

A third important element of the consultation, alongside the excursions and lectures, was a welcoming reception with speeches. Four directors of local Protestant missionary societies and EMW Chair Pastor Dietmar Arends joined other external guests at the conference hotel, underlining their support for dialogue with China. The Federal Government Commissioner for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Thomas Rachel, as well as the Protestant and Catholic churches' official representatives to the Federal Government, Prelate Dr. Anne Gidion and Prelate Dr. Karl Jüsten, spoke words of welcome. Mr. Rachel employed diplomatic finesse and respectful courtesy to express to the guests the necessity of repre-

senting the Federal Government's value-based position. A very warm welcome was given by Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, current Moderator of the World Council of Churches' Central Committee, where he works closely with the CCC representatives Rev. Ms. Dr. Lin Manhong and Ms. Gu Jingqin, who had both actively helped prepare the consultation. The leader of the Chinese delegation, TSPM Chairman Pastor Xu Xiaohong, was the first to speak at the reception and stressed the good relationship and the constantly reliable cooperation between the Protestant churches in China and Germany during a phase in which the overall relations between the states could be defined as neither warm nor cold, and he expressed his hope for continued dialogue and deepening friendship.

At the consultation's final session, Rev. Dr. Lin Manhong and Rev. Ute Hedrich judged the event to have been a success and summarized a few of their personal impressions in warm words. Gifts were exchanged, accolades were spoken, and the Chinese side especially expressed its gratitude for the extensive preparations and the carefully designed exposure program, with particular thanks going to Dr. Eckhard Zemmrich.



Pastor Xu Xiaohong presents a gift to Dr. Bedford-Strohm. Photograph: China-Zentrum Archive.

When questioned on the bus en route to the airport, the United Front official confirmed that he was very positively impressed by the entire consultation, by Berlin, by the program, and by the quality of the exchange. He had been particularly happy about one detail: that those preparing the event had remembered to make hot water and loose tea leaves available to their Chinese guests at all times.

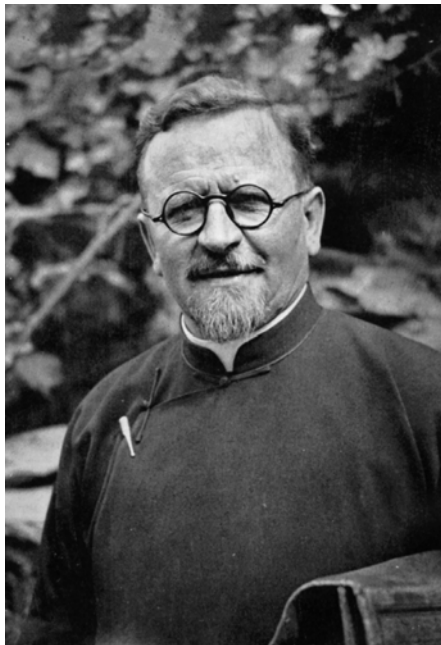
Wandering Afar

Franz Xaver Biallas (1878–1936), China Missionary of the Society of the Divine Word, Sinologist and Founder of the Journal *Monumenta Serica*

Barbara Hoster

Translated by Anna Clart

In the first half of the 20th century, Franz Xaver Biallas was an important figure in the Society of the Divine Word's China mission. By founding the Chinese studies journal *Monumenta Serica*, which celebrated its 90th anniversary in 2025, he made a lasting contribution to research into Chinese culture. This article gives an outline of Fr. Biallas's life



Franz Xaver Biallas S.V.D.
Photograph: *Monumenta Serica* 1 (1935–1936)
2, frontispiece.

and follows the traces he left behind in the histories of both the S.V.D. and Sinology itself.

This well-known portrait photograph of Biallas was taken in Peking, around 1933. By then, Biallas was already in his mid-fifties and teaching as a professor at Fu Jen Catholic University. His clothing – a traditional Chinese robe (*changpao* 長袍) combined with a Roman collar – shows him as both a scholar and a priest. With a ballpoint or fountain pen clipped to the diagonally cut edge of his robe and a briefcase tucked under his arm, Father Biallas presents himself as a self-assured, energetic man in his prime. His look is a little sceptical, giving the camera only the hint of a smile. The shot shows him in his life's most fruitful phase, judged both personally and academically – yet the path there had been a long and difficult one.¹

This article is the expanded version of a lecture Dr. Barbara Hoster gave on 24 October 2024, on invitation of the Monumenta Serica Institute in the Missionspriesterseminar Sankt Augustin. For further information on the journal, see also Hans van Ess's article "90 Jahre Zeitschrift *Monumenta Serica* in ihrem sinologischen Kontext," in: *China heute* XLIV (2025) 3, pp. 186–195; cf. the English translation published in *Verbum SVD* 66 (2025) 3, pp. 299–314.

- 1 My most important source for the life of Fr. Biallas is Part I of Kollár 2011, "Biographischer Überblick," pp. 11–165. Apart from where I give direct quotations, I dispense with specific page references from Part I and refer only to the letters by and to Biallas featured in Part II.

Franz Xaver Biallas was born on 15 November 1878 in the Silesian village of Schwirz (today's Świerczów) in the diocese of Breslau. He was the tenth of twelve children in a Catholic farming family. Silesia was then a province of the German Empire, its population a mix of Polish- and German-speakers. Biallas's family spoke German, and little Franz learned Polish out in his village. This bilingualism doubtlessly proved a good foundation for his later fluent grasp of various foreign languages. Franz grew up in poor circumstances, and his pious parents raised him in the Catholic faith. At the Catholic primary school in Schwirz that he attended for eight years, Franz came into contact with Catholic journals filled with popular depictions of the adventurous lives of missionaries in faraway lands. This was firmly in line with the *Zeitgeist*: a great enthusiasm for spreading Christianity among the so-called heathens had swept 19th-century Europe and the USA. Over the course of this missionary movement, numerous orders and missionary societies were founded.² Among them was the Society of the Divine Word (*Societas Verbi Divini*, S.V.D. for short), called to life in 1875, three years before Franz Xaver Biallas's birth, in the Dutch village of Steyl by the diocesan priest Arnold Janssen.³ In honour of the Society's founding location, its members are also called "Steyl missionaries" in German-speaking countries. The printed word played a large role in their missionary work, through the publication of missionary journals like *Steyler Missionsbote* and *Kleiner Herz-Jesu-Bote*.

As a fifteen-year-old pupil, Franz Xaver Biallas harboured a wish to become a missionary. In 1893, on the recommendation of his parish priest, Franz applied at the only recently founded mission house Heiligkreuz of the S.V.D., in Neuland near Neisse, and was accepted. The gifted boy from modest circumstances was certainly typical of the Divine Word missionaries' new recruits, who were often drawn from rural areas with sparse educational opportunities. The young missionary society offered them a challenging education, which in Biallas's case consisted of five Gymnasium years in Heiligkreuz (1893–1898) and seven years of study at the mission house of St. Gabriel, in Mödling near Vienna (1898–1905). The first two years of the so-called Lyceum in St. Gabriel consisted of philosophy taught alongside mandatory natural science subjects such as physics, chemistry and meteorology, but also elective subjects such as modern languages, construction and agriculture, to prepare the budding missionaries for the practical challenges of their missionary deployment.

China was the S.V.D.'s first missionary region – two Divine Word missionaries were sent there a mere four years after the society's founding.⁴ But becoming a missionary to China was apparently far from Biallas's thoughts. In his "Petitio," the official mission statement every Steyl Father had to send to General Superior Arnold Janssen after his ordination, he wrote, in late 1904:

But if I were to estimate the degree of joy with which I would report at the individual locations, I would count the African and Australian mission in first place,

2 For an overview of all orders and missionary societies active in China, including numerous newly founded ones, see Tiedemann 2009. On the missionary movement in general, see Schmiedl 2009.

3 On the S.V.D.'s 150th anniversary in 2025, see Miotk – Lazar – de Rivera 2025.

4 These were Johann Baptist Anzer and Josef Freinademetz, the latter canonised in 2003. On both China missionaries, see i.a. Leeb's short appraisal (Leeb 2025).

*only then America and in last place China – although I would surely also go to China, should this be God's will.*⁵

Although China was at the very end of Biallas's list of desired missionary regions, it was the country to which Arnold Janssen decided to commit him, apparently due to his good academic accomplishments and linguistic talents. But an unexpected political circumstance prevented Fr. Biallas from being sent to China immediately: in 1905, to fill acute vacancies in the teaching staff, Fr. Biallas went to the mission house of St. Wendel in the Saarland, a region in southwestern Germany, and stayed there for the next five years; he taught various subjects, including mathematics, history, Greek and French. His career path then took another turn thanks to Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt S.V.D. (1868–1954). Schmidt taught theology and linguistics in St. Gabriel and had come to know and value the young Franz Xaver Biallas during his studies there. Schmidt made a name for himself as a researcher of Oceania, Southeast Asia and Australia. In 1906, he founded the ethnological journal *Anthropos* and strove from the start to bring the freshly minted priest Biallas on board for editorial work. In 1910, the order's leadership finally granted his appeal. Fr. Biallas had, in the meantime, received his missionary commission to China, but on Schmidt's recommendation was first sent to Berlin to study ethnology and Sinology. Fr. Schmidt remained Biallas's mentor and later had a decisive influence on his Sinological work.

At the Seminary for Oriental Languages (Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen, SOS) of the Royal Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin, Biallas learned not just Chinese but Russian and Sanskrit too. The SOS was founded in 1887 as a training institute for aspiring diplomats and colonial officials.⁶ A chair for Sinology in Berlin was not established until 1912, with the appointment of the Dutch Sinologist Jan Jakob Maria de Groot.⁷

In 1912, after two years of study in Berlin, Biallas wrote the following to his General Superior:

*It's arguably getting a little easier within this Chinese "thicket of symbols," fighting the characters each and every day, but the work in Sinology seems unfathomable. One feels like a weak boatman out on the vast ocean.*⁸

In the same letter, he wrote positively about his academic teacher, Prof. de Groot, who though no adherent of missionary efforts valued the works on China that Catholic missionaries had produced.

Fr. Biallas's superiors urged him to finish his Sinological studies soon, for they had reached a final decision to send him to the S.V.D. mission in the Chinese province of Shandong, which was suffering from an acute staffing shortage. He thus received the mis-

5 Letter no. 3, Kollár 2011, p. 216, translated. German original: "Sollte ich aber den Grad der Freudigkeit, mit dem ich einzelne Stellen antreten würde, abschätzen, so würde ich die afrikanische und australische Mission an erster Stelle aufzählen, dann erst Amerika und an letzter Stelle China, obgleich ich auch gewiß nach China gehen würde, falls dies Gottes Wille ist."

6 On this, see Kreiner 1989 and Schütte 2002, p. 52.

7 Schütte 2002, p. 55.

8 Letter no. 14, Kollár 2011, p. 47 and 228, translated. German original: "Es wird ja wohl schon etwas leichter in dem chinesischen 'Zeichen-Wald', wenn man täglich mit den Charakteren kämpft, aber die Arbeit in der Sinologie scheint unermesslich. Man hat das Gefühl des schwachen Schiffers auf dem großen Ozean."

sionary cross, which missionaries were given shortly before departure, as early as 1913, in the motherhouse in Steyl.



Franz Xaver Biallas (second from right) as a newly ordained priest wearing his missionary cross. Steyl, 3 August 1913. Photograph: S.V.D. General Archives, Rome.

On Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt's suggestion, however, Biallas did not travel to China immediately; rather, he set off to Paris for a semester of studies in January 1914. He attended lectures of the renowned French Sinologists Edouard Chavannes and Paul Pelliot at the Sorbonne, and apparently also studied Tibetan, for he wrote serving General Superior Nikolaus Blum to say:

*[...] I want to make haste as much as possible to reach the goal, the Promised Land of China. Daily I sit deep into the night over the Chinese, Tibetan etc. texts, often as late as 2–3 o'clock [...]. Comparing such different texts, grasping their sense, finding the right translation – all that is sheer endless work.*⁹

Unfortunately, the letter does not reveal the subject of the academic work with which he was striving to earn a diploma at the École des hautes études.¹⁰

9 Letter no. 17, Kollár 2011, p. 232, translated. German original: "[...] ich will [mich] beeilen so gut es eben geht, um halt ans Ziel zu kommen, ins gelobte Land Chinas. Ich sitze täglich bis tief in die Nacht über den chinesischen, tibetischen etc. Texten, gar oft bis 2–3 Uhr [...]. Es ist eine schier unendliche Arbeit, so verschiedene Texte zu vergleichen, den rechten Sinn zu erfassen suchen, die rechte Übersetzung zu finden."

10 Biallas mentions this work again in a later letter, but without going into particulars. See Kollár 2011, p. 82, fn. 218.

In the summer of 1914, after the planned completion of his four-year studies, Biallas was meant to finally set out on his mission to China – yet this time, too, his plans were foiled by the prevailing circumstances: the First World War had broken out. He could sit no more exams in Paris, for his German citizenship made Franz Xaver Biallas subject to conscription. Biallas spent the next four years (1915–1919) serving as military chaplain in Kassel. He there held masses in French and Polish for the many prisoners of war, and ministered to the wounded in sick bays. At the same time, he continued his Sinological studies and was enrolled at the University of Leipzig. A document from the university's archives reveals that Biallas attended university lectures from the summer semester 1917 to the winter semester 1918/1919, including ones on Chinese philosophy, literature, grammar and cultural history given by August Conrady (1864–1925) and Eduard Erkes (1891–1958). Sessions on *Völkerpsychologie* with Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), ethnography and Indian literature were also on his timetable.¹¹

Shortly after the war's end, Biallas could report to his superiors that:

*As far as possible, I used every moment my duties left free to further my studies for the mission. I also managed to complete a new doctoral thesis for Leipzig's Faculty of Philosophy, and on Friday, 13 Dec. [19]18, I passed my oral exam with full success.*¹²

His dissertation dealt with ancient Chinese literature and was titled “K'üh Yüan's 'Fahrt in die Ferne' (Yüan-yu). Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Erläuterungen” (K'üh Yüan's “Wandering Afar” [Yüan-yu]: Introduction, Text, Translation and Commentary). The subject had been suggested by his doctoral supervisor Conrady, who was highly interested in questions of cultural history and used non-canonical texts like *Chuci* 楚辭 (Songs of Chu), a collection of seventeen poems, to search for traces of early Chinese culture.¹³ In Leipzig, Biallas had attended classes on Qu Yuan 屈原 and his attributed work *Chuci* that were taught by both Conrady and Erkes.¹⁴

Qu Yuan is the earliest poet of Chinese literature known by name, said to have lived around 300 BC in the state of Chu 楚 in southern China, approximately in the region of today's provinces of Hubei and Hunan. In China, he embodied the prototype of the loyal servant of the state. But his advice was ignored at court, and he was sent into exile. Seized with despair, he drowned himself in the Miluo 汨羅 river. Whether Qu Yuan can really be viewed as *Chu Ci*'s author remains disputed.¹⁵ Biallas, too, grappled with this question in

11 University archive Leipzig, document no. 496 from 25 October 1918 (File: Protokolle über den Studierenden erteilte Abgangs- und Studienzeugnisse vom 1. Januar – 31. Dezember 1918 [Protocols on the graduation and study certificates granted to students from 1 January to 31 December 1918]).

12 Letter no. 28, Kollár 2011, p. 245, translated. German original: “Soweit es mir möglich war, habe ich jeden Augenblick benutzt, der neben der Pflicht frei geblieben war, um die Studien für die Mission zu fördern. Es ist mir auch gelungen, für die Philosophische Fakultät in Leipzig eine neue Doktorarbeit fertig zu machen, und Freitag, den 13. Dez. [19]18 habe ich das Mündliche mit vollem Erfolg bestanden.”

13 See Biallas's expression of gratitude to Conrady in Biallas 1927, p. 106. In German Sinology, Conrady is credited as a co-founder of the Leipzig School. For further details on this research programme, see Clart 2016, pp. 77–78, with mention of Fr. Biallas as Conrady's pupil (p. 77).

14 Both classes are listed in the document mentioned in fn. 11.

15 On the position of Western research today, which generally attributes only a small portion of *Chu Ci* to the historical Qu Yuan, see Kern – Owen 2024.

his doctoral thesis. His work focused on the poem “Wandering Afar” (Yuan you 遠游), at that time little heeded in Western Sinology and not yet translated. The poem describes a cosmic trip, reveals shamanist traits and ends in a *unio mystica*. Biallas, following his doctoral supervisor Conrady, interpreted the text’s allusions to breathing techniques as the result of influences from Indian yoga practice – a thesis no longer supported today. Rather, scholars now place it in the tradition of Chinese Daoism, which had also developed elaborate breathing techniques.¹⁶

In Biallas’s German translation of the poem “Yuan you”, which has 89 verses, he renders the first two verses as follows:

*Bekümmert über die drückende Bedrängnis der Gebräuche der Zeit,
wünsche ich, leicht (geworden) mich zu erheben und in die Ferne zu fahren.*¹⁷

That is:

*Distressed at the heavy oppression of the customs of the time,
I wish to arise (having become) light(ly) and journey into the distance.*

The slightly cumbersome language shows that Biallas was aiming not for an easily readable translation but for a literal one.¹⁸ It is typical of his painstaking way of working that he did not submit his doctoral thesis for publication shortly after his examination in 1918, but instead spent years revising it to take into account more recent Chinese research on Qu Yuan. His work on “Wandering Afar” did not appear until years later, published in two parts in the journal *Asia Major* in Leipzig.¹⁹

From the start, Biallas viewed his upcoming sojourn in China as placing him not just in the service of the mission but also in that of academia. In September 1920, Biallas, now a Sinologist having passed the doctoral exam, wrote the S.V.D.’s general administrator Johann Bodems:

*And since my current researches drive home ever more strongly the necessity of working in East Asia, I would like to dutifully repeat my wish to reach China as soon as possible, and for a twofold reason: to publish my academic works in the near future, and to put myself fully at the service of the beautiful mission in China.*²⁰

16 On this poem, see Kroll 2024; on Biallas’s translation and his thesis, see particularly pp. 437–438.

17 Biallas 1932, p. 179. The Chinese original reads: 悲時俗之迫阨兮 / 願輕舉而遠遊.

18 He comments thus on his translation strategy: “Dem Zweck der Arbeit entsprechend ist besonders darauf Gewicht gelegt worden, den Sinn des Textes zu erfassen und wortgetreu wiederzugeben; darum mögen auch manche Härten der Übersetzung entschuldigt werden.” [In line with the aim of this work, particular emphasis has been laid on capturing the sense of the text and rendering it verbatim; the translation’s various rough points may thus be excused.] Biallas 1927, p. 104. Compare also the later German translation of this verse by Peter Weber-Schäfer: “Gefangen in den Wirren der Welt / Wollt ich den Sorgen entschweben” (Weber-Schäfer 1967, p. 89). Weber-Schäfer gives the poem’s title as “Die weite Fahrt” (The Long Journey). In his brief details on “Sources and Literature,” he refers only to *Chuci*’s English translations by Arthur Waley and David Hawkes, but makes no mention of Biallas’s German rendering of “Yuan you” (*ibid.*, p. 213).

19 The first part in *Asia Major* 4 (1927), pp. 50–107, features Biallas’s introduction to “Yuan you”; the second in *Asia Major* 7 (1932), pp. 179–241, his translation with annotations.

20 Letter no. 32, Kollár 2011, pp. 84 and 253, translated. German original: “Und da mir bei meinen jetzigen Arbeiten die Notwendigkeit, in Ostasien zu schaffen, immer fühlbarer wird, so möchte ich auch noch den Wunsch gehorsamst wiederholen, möglichst bald nach China zu kommen, und zwar aus dem doppelten Grunde: um meine

In the summer of 1921, the now 42-year-old Fr. Biallas finally set out from Steyl towards China. His luggage included a camera. To prepare his academic work, he had also completed a course on photography in Berlin, which was to prove incredibly useful to his field research in China, especially for his book on the Temple of Confucius. Shortly before his departure, Biallas composed a longer letter to the S.V.D.'s generalate in Rome, in which he laid out his plans for his work in China. Among other things, he intended to write academic papers on the land and its people, mores and customs that could be of immediate use to the mission. He also envisaged founding an academic journal for East Asia and a kind of "writers' home" for young missionaries, one where they could learn to pen works in Chinese – for, as Biallas wrote, "the Protestants are flooding China with their pieces," and the Catholics needed to catch up.²¹ Fr. Biallas thus had lofty plans – but as he was soon to learn, not all could be realised.

When he finally reached Yanzhou 兗州, the S.V.D.'s centre in Shandong Province's southern part, on 3 June 1922 after a detour through the USA and Japan, he found a flourishing missionary region with almost 100,000 Catholics, numerous churches and Catholic schools.²² There were also hospitals, orphanages and old-age homes, along with two missionary printing houses. Yanzhou was also home to 60-year-old Bishop Augustin Henninghaus, who during his almost 30 years in China had particularly championed the S.V.D.'s educational and publishing activities.²³ Fr. Biallas began his stay by living in the episcopal residence in Yanzhou. Henninghaus evidently had little idea what to do with the educated new missionary. Even before Biallas's arrival in China, Henninghaus had written to Steyl:

As far as Fr. Biallas is concerned, I never expected him to accomplish much here as a practical missionary. That won't lead to much. If he is to be a practical missionary, his Sinological studies will have been fairly useless – he doesn't need them. But if he is to continue his studies, there will be little point in putting him to work out at the mission, or only for a brief time, to give him a bit of an insight.²⁴

This quote throws the conflict between academia and mission into sharp relief: mission work needed priests who had mastered the spoken language, especially the local dialect – but not experts on Chinese culture, like Biallas, who were familiar only with the clas-

wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten bald publizieren und der schönen Mission in China mich ganz zur Verfügung stellen zu können."

21 Letter no. 38, Kollár 2011, p. 258, translated. German original: "die Protestanten überschäumen China mit ihren Werken".

22 See more details in Kollár 2011, p. 95.

23 Henninghaus had reached Shandong in 1886 and was named Apostolic Vicar in 1904. On his role in the educational system, see Rivinius 1993.

24 Kollár 2011, p. 96, translated. German original: "Was Fr. Biallas betrifft, habe ich nie damit gerechnet, daß er hier als praktischer Missionar etwas leisten würde. Das wird wohl nicht viel geben. Soll er praktischer Missionar sein, so ist sein sinologisches Studium ziemlich nutzlos gewesen; das brauchte er nicht. Soll er aber seine Studien weiter betreiben, so wird es nicht viel Zweck haben, ihn draußen in der Mission zu beschäftigen oder doch nur für kurze Zeit, daß er einen kleinen Einblick bekommt."

Of all people, it had been Henninghaus – the man here railing against the Sinologist Biallas – who, shortly before his episcopal consecration on 30 October 1904, had demanded of the Generalate in Steyl that the missionaries deployed to China be academically trained ("For the missionary, study is the eighth sacrament." / German original: "Studium ist für den Missionar das achte Sakrament."). See the citation in Kollár 2011, p. 30.

sical written language. Theoretically, new missionaries were to attend a one-year course for language training; in practice, however, they were frequently assigned pastoral duties immediately after their arrival and learned the Chinese language only on the side.²⁵ In contrast, Fr. Biallas wanted to follow a language course in the vernacular, which he had presumably not learned during his studies in Europe, in order to return as rapidly as possible to his academic projects. His wish for an educated Chinese man as a language teacher was denied him, and he was forced to hire a private teacher at his own expense – with money requested from family and friends. His difficulties were compounded by his trouble adjusting to Shandong's climate, and Fr. Biallas was frequently sick during his first half year in China.

A few months after his arrival, in October 1922, Fr. Biallas was transferred to Qingdao 青島. The port city had been founded in 1898 as the capital of the “German Protectorate of Kiao-chou”; with its colonial buildings in the Wilhelminian style, it looked like a German model settlement in the Far East. Qingdao was occupied by Japan at the start of the First World War and only returned to China in 1922. The Divine Word missionaries had a little community in Qingdao consisting of four fathers, and they also ran a printing house. Fr. Biallas was assigned to minister to the large foreign congregation, preaching in both English and French. He soon developed the idea for a new academic project, one he zealously followed – a book about Confucius and in particular his religious veneration. In Qufu 曲阜, Confucius's birthplace, there was – and still is today – a large temple complex as well as the residence of the Kong 孔 family, Confucius's descendants. Shandong is thus seen as a holy site of Chinese culture, for the philosophy and religion that developed from Confucius's teachings and the veneration of his person form a foundational element of said culture, Confucianism. It was no coincidence that the Divine Word missionaries settled their episcopal residence in Yanzhou – that is, immediately adjacent to Confucius's birthplace. After all, they understood themselves as the bearers of an alternative religion and culture, Christianity. Despite the competition between their worldviews, however, the S.V.D. fathers strove to establish good contacts with the Kong family: Bishop Henninghaus made several visits to Confucius's 76th descendant in Qufu, Kong Lingyi 孔令貽 (1872–1919), and “Duke Kong” reciprocated by visiting Henninghaus's episcopal residence in Yanzhou. Another Divine Word missionary, Brother Rudolf Pötter, was the personal physician of Kong Decheng 孔德成 (1920–2008), the son of Kong Lingyi. Fr. Biallas made use of these good contacts in field research for his planned book. In June 1924, he visited the temple complex in Qufu alongside his confrère Fr. Andreas Mohrbacher (1884–1960), to photograph and measure its buildings for his book.

In September of that same year, both Steyl fathers were then permitted to take part in the solemn annual rites for the veneration of Confucius – the first foreigners ever to be granted this honour. The following quotation from the epilogue of Biallas's book clearly shows the Catholic missionary's fascination with this experience:

25 Information provided personally by Fr. Karl Josef Rivinius S.V.D., in an email from 17 October 2024. On how the S.V.D.'s new missionaries in Shandong were trained, see also Hu Baozhu 2023, especially pp. 173–174.

The night of the sacrifice, I went to the temple around eleven o'clock. Creaking, the old western gate of the city opened. [...] From various sides one saw lanterns guiding the celebration's guests to the sacrifice. The places before the temple and in the courtyards were already teeming with life: servants, musicians, singers and soldiers walked to and fro. [...] When the third double hour of the night – eleven o'clock – was displayed on the old nocturnal, a loud cry sounded from the Hall of Fasting, and a man in front of the "Gate of Great Completion" began to strike a kettledrum at a lightning pace, [...] and its roar called one and all to the great autumn sacrifice.²⁶



Andreas Mohrbacher S.V.D. and Franz Xaver Biallas S.V.D. at the grave of Confucius in Qufu, 1924.
Photograph: *Fu Jen Magazine* IV (1935) 5, p. 77.

The first yield of Fr. Biallas's and Fr. Mohrbacher's fieldwork was an imposing wooden model of Qufu's Temple of Confucius, which was constructed in the S.V.D.'s workshops in

26 Biallas 1928a, p. 107, translated. German original: "In der Nacht des Opfers ging ich gegen elf Uhr zum Tempel. Knarrend öffnete sich das alte Westtor der Stadt [...] Von verschiedenen Seiten sah man Laternen, die die Festgäste zum Opfer führten. Vor dem Tempel und in den Höfen war schon reges Leben: Diener, Musiker, Sänger und Soldaten gingen hin und her. [...] Als die dritte Doppelstunde der Nacht – elf Uhr – durch die alte Sternenuhr angezeigt worden, erscholl von der Fastenhalle ein lauter Ruf und ein Mann begann in rasendem Tempo vor dem 'Tore der Großen Vollendung' auf die Pauke zu schlagen, [...] und dröhnend rief diese alle zum großen Herbstopfer."

Shandong by brothers trained in artisan work.²⁷ This model, measuring 1.4 m wide and 6 m long, was built true to the two Fathers' measurements, and in December 1924 it was sent to Rome to be displayed as the Divine Word China mission's contribution to the Vatican's monumental Pontifical Missionary Exhibition of the Holy Year 1925. Biallas wrote a 30-page accompanying text to explain the model.²⁸ Today, the model forms part of the collection of the Ethnological Museum of the Vatican (inventory number 120581).



"A Model of Qufu" for the 1925 Vatican Missionary Exhibition showing the Temple of Confucius.
Photograph: Monumenta Serica Institute archive.

Yet four more years were to pass before Fr. Biallas's planned book could finally be completed; in 1928, it was published under the title *Konfuzius und sein Kult: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte Chinas und ein Führer zur Heimatstadt des Konfuzius* (Confucius and His Cult: A Contribution to the Cultural History of China and Guide to Confucius' Hometown).²⁹

While Biallas was still working on this book about Confucius in Qingdao, conflicts with his order's superiors came to a head: several were displeased with his academic productivity, while others showed no interest at all in his academic projects. Biallas, for his part, criticised what he viewed as the insufficient preparation of new missionaries for their deployment in China, for which he held Bishop Henninghaus responsible. This criticism of the long-serving and honoured bishop found little favour amongst the S.V.D.'s generalate. Biallas's personality, too, seems to have aggravated the conflict: he was difficult in

²⁷ See Mohrbacher 1926, p. 49.

²⁸ A copy of this text can be found in the Monumenta Serica Institute's archive (according to Kollár 2011, p. 262, fn. 102).

²⁹ For further details on this book's contents and reception, see Hoster 2018.

personal interactions, had a tendency to criticise others and was distinctly proud. Because his confrères' complaints against him were piling up, the generalate decided to call Biallas back to Europe. This message struck him to the bone and sparked a strong personal crisis. In 1926, he left the city of Qingdao in great haste and travelled to Shanghai, where he found accommodation with Steyl's small mission office in the French concession (Route des Sœurs, today's Ruijin lu 瑞金路). From there, Fr. Biallas composed a ten-page letter in his own defense to General Superior Wilhelm Gier in Steyl, in which he once more listed the academic works he had begun since his arrival in China: the revision of his doctoral thesis, the book on Confucius as well as several guides on Chinese language and culture, which were to serve as instructional material for the Divine Word missionaries newly arriving in China. This letter combined with the intercession of a confrère, Johannes Weig, who was friends with Biallas, finally succeeded in putting the conflict to rest. Biallas was allowed to remain in China, on the condition that he use his stay in Shanghai to publish his academic works at the nearest possible date. Further, he was to change his behaviour towards his superiors and abide faithfully by the congregation's rules, including giving up smoking – then a forbidden practice for S.V.D. missionaries.

Fr. Biallas felt decidedly more comfortable in the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai than he had in the provinces of northern China. The city's international population – c. 50,000 foreigners, largely Japanese, British and Russians, but also French, Americans and Germans – mostly lived in one of the three great concessions. The Sinologist Biallas had access to several well-equipped libraries. He became a member of the British Royal Asiatic Society, which had a subsidiary institute in Shanghai. He participated in this scientific society, gave a lecture there and published an article on the poet Qu Yuan in their *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.³⁰ Thanks to his excellent English and French language skills, Biallas frequently mixed in academic and diplomatic circles. He also socialised with Chinese scholars, such as the jurist and philosopher Carson Chang (Zhang Junmai 張君勱, also known as Zhang Jiasen 張嘉森 [1887–1969]), with whom he planned to co-author a book on the subject of “The Spiritual Upheaval of China in Recent Times.”³¹ It was during his time in Shanghai that his translation of Qu Yuan's poem “Wandering Afar” also finally appeared in print, namely in the renowned Sinological journal *Asia Major* in Leipzig. In addition, Biallas was ministering to the German, Russian and Polish congregations of Shanghai. The mission's procurator once even sent him on a diplomatic negotiation with the Chinese foreign minister in Nanjing, a negotiation concerned with goods deliveries for the newly founded Divine Word mission in the province of Gansu.³²

Yet despite the intellectually stimulating environment, Biallas did not wish to remain in Shanghai long-term. In 1926, in the year of his arrival, he wrote General Superior Wilhelm Gier of his wish to go to Peking, to serve as a professor at Fu Jen Catholic University, which had been newly founded in 1925:

30 “K'u Yüan, His Life and Poems,” in: *JNCBRAS* LIX (1928), pp. 231–253.

31 See letter no. 50, Kollár 2011, p. 297, translated. German original: “Die geistige Umwälzung Chinas in der letzten Zeit”. Among other places, Chang studied in Germany and was the pupil of the philosopher Rudolf Eucken in Jena, with whom he co-published a book, *Das Lebensproblem in China und Europa*, Leipzig 1922. On Chang's stay in Germany, see Harnisch 1999, pp. 178–190.

32 On this, see Kollár 2011, p. 107.

[...] it will be for the best for me to join the work of the university in Peking, so that I can best make use of my knowledge, to best help the mission in China. [...] A central aim of the university is also to support Sinological research, and it is there that I will find exactly what I am looking for.³³

Fu Jen University's name derived from a saying by Confucius, whom Biallas so admired, that means as much as "promoting humanity" (*fu ren* 輔仁).³⁴ The university's founding was rooted in the wish of the Chinese Catholic and publicist Ying Lianzhi 英斂之 (1866–1926), who as early as 1912 had petitioned Pope Pius X for a Catholic university in the Chinese capital. Fu Jen University was to dedicate itself to Chinese culture, introduce Western sciences and promote Catholic religion. The American Benedictines of the Saint Vincent Archabbey in Pennsylvania had at first been charged with establishing and administering this university. But the financial burden of maintaining a university proved too heavy for the order, so in 1933 the responsibility for Fu Jen University was transferred to the S.V.D.

In this situation, the S.V.D.'s generalate remembered the multilingual Fr. Biallas's diplomatic finesse and recalled him from Shanghai to Peking to join the negotiations around the Divine Word missionaries taking over the university. This was Biallas's most important assignment as a member of the S.V.D. to date. In May 1933, he and a confrère rushed without delay to Peking, where he shone in his new mission, largely thanks to his excellent English and French as well as his (by now) good Chinese skills. He also won the trust of Fu Jen University's Chinese president, the important historian Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1880–1971), and of other Chinese professors. After the S.V.D.'s successful takeover of the university, Fr. Biallas was the first Divine Word mission member to be placed on the faculty, as Professor of Sociology, History and Ethnology. He gave his lessons in English. Alongside his teaching duties, he served as editor of two academic journals of the university – the Chinese *Furen xuezhì* 輔仁學誌 (*Fu Jen Sinological Journal*) and the English *Bulletin of the Catholic University of Peking*. He was also editor for a project on a Catholic encyclopaedia that was to appear in China.³⁵

In its first year under the S.V.D. missionaries' administration, Fu Jen had just under 600 students enrolled across three faculties.³⁶ The university was also affiliated with two middle schools, one for boys and one for girls. The teaching staff consisted of 159 persons,³⁷ comprising both S.V.D. fathers and Chinese teachers and professors. The university's personal and financial situation remained strained. Fr. Biallas used many letters and reports

33 Letter no. 46, Shanghai, 11 November 1926, Kollár 2011, p. 291, translated. German original: "[...] es wird das Beste sein, ich werde an der Universität in Peking mitarbeiten, so kann ich meine Kenntnisse zum Besten der Mission in China am besten verwerten. [...] Ein Hauptziel der Universität ist auch die Förderung der sinologischen Forschungen und da werde ich gerade finden, was ich suche."

34 *Lunyu* 論語 XII/24: *Junzi yi wen hui you, yi you fu ren* 君子以文會友，以友輔仁 ("The superior man on grounds of culture meets with his friends, and by friendship helps his virtue"), translation by James Legge, in Legge 1861, p. 126. The term *ren* can be translated in many ways, I prefer "humanity" here.

35 Yet the project was never realised. On this, see Rivinius 2013.

36 The faculties were Liberal Arts (Chinese Language and Literature, Western Languages and Literature, History, Sociology and Economics), Natural Sciences (Chemistry and Biology, Physics and Mathematics) and Educational Science (Pedagogy, Philosophy and Psychology). See Rivinius 2016, pp. 129 and 211.

37 Rivinius 2016, p. 130.



Members of the administration of Fu Jen University, Peking 1934. 2nd from the right Franz Xaver Biallas, 3rd from the right President Chen Yuan. Photograph: *Bulletin of the Catholic University of Peking*, no. 9 (Nov. 1934), p. 196.

to the S.V.D.'s General Superior (now situated in Rome) to develop possible solutions to various problems.³⁸

Although he was already very busy with his teaching and administrative duties, Biallas did not lose sight of his cherished wish: the expansion of Sinological research. In 1934, he used the *Bulletin of the Catholic University of Peking* to announce the foundation of a new international journal for Sinology. He saw Peking, which was the centre of old Chinese culture and sciences on the one hand and of collaboration between Chinese and Europeans on the other, as its ideal venue. Moreover, he argued, as the new journal's supporter, the S.V.D. offered a unique combination: the Christianisation of peoples and research into their languages and cultures. Biallas here cites the journal *Anthropos* as a model for the S.V.D.'s academic ambitions.³⁹ The visit of *Anthropos*'s founder, the important ethnologist and S.V.D. priest Wilhelm Schmidt, to Peking in the summer of 1935 doubtlessly spurred on the new journal's foundation. Schmidt, by now an internationally respected academic, spent part of his time in China giving lectures at Fu Jen University; he also made recommendations on how to reform the university and sharpen its academic profile.⁴⁰ As already mentioned, Fr. Biallas enjoyed a special relationship with Schmidt, who had been his spiritual mentor ever since his studies at the missionary seminary of St. Gabriel, thirty years before. In a personal dedication in his book *Konfuzius und sein Kult*, Biallas called him the "inspirer and promoter of my Sinological studies."⁴¹ Little wonder, then, that an article

38 See especially letters 57, 57a, 58, 61, 61a, 62, 63, 64a, 65, 65a and 67a in Kollár 2011.

39 *Bulletin of the Catholic University of Peking* 9 (1934), p. ii. The preface is not marked with a name, but Kollár notes that Biallas had served as the bulletin's editor since autumn 1933 (Kollár 2011, p. 12) and can thus be presumed to be the author.

40 On this, see Rivinius 2016, ch. 5 and 6.

41 Biallas 1928a, p. 5 (unpaged), translated. German original: "Anreger und Förderer meiner sinologischen Studien".

penned by Fr. Schmidt on “The Oldest Culture-Circles in Asia” introduced the very first edition of *Monumenta Serica*.⁴²



Cover of the first issue of *Monumenta Serica*, Peking 1935.

The first issue of *Monumenta Serica* appeared in late 1935 in Peking.⁴³ The Latin title can be translated as “Chinese monuments.” The adjective “serica” is derived from “Seres,” which in Roman antiquity was the name of a people settled in East Asia known for their silk production. This Latin name is also meant as a reminder of early exchanges between China and the Occident along the Silk Road. China’s relations to the outside world are also highlighted by the Chinese name *Huayi xuezhi* 華裔學志, which means “academic journal on China and its neighbouring peoples.” Finally, the new journal received an English subtitle – *Journal of Oriental Studies*. “Oriental Studies” was then the customary term for Asian studies. The style of the Chinese characters as well as the two seated lions on the cover page seem a bit archaic, as does the classical Antiqua font of the Western text sections.⁴⁴ This graphic design was apparently intended to allude to the cultural “monuments” with which the journal wanted to concern itself.

42 *Monumenta Serica* I (1935) 1, pp. 1–16. As the first footnote in the article Biallas wrote as editor-in-chief reveals, Schmidt was presented as the leading representative of the cultural historical method, which was seen as pioneering. The footnote concludes with the words “We therefore publish this article believing that it will contribute in no small measure to the study of the origin of Chinese culture (Ed.)”

43 The exact publication date can no longer be determined. On December 2, 1935, the rector of Fu Jen University, Fr. Joseph Henkels S.V.D., wrote to General Superior Grendel to say “Father Biallas’s *Monumenta Serica* are not out yet” (Kollár 2011, letter no. 198, p. 563). On January 15, 1936, Fr. Biallas also wrote to Joseph Grendel: “Nun noch ein paar Worte zu unsern [sic] *Monumenta Serica*. Sie haben unterdessen die erste Nummer erhalten [...]” [Now a few words about our *Monumenta Serica*. You have received the first issue by now] (Kollár 2011, letter no. 63, p. 347). Going by this, the first issue must have appeared in December or early January. Taking into consideration the postal journey from China to Italy, a publication in late December can be presumed.

44 For more details on the design, see Gumbrecht 1994, p. 41.

The title page of the first volume names not just the editor Franz Xavier Biallas but also his associate editors. These were evenly composed of four Europeans and four Chinese. Through his good contacts at Fu Jen University and amongst Peking academic circles, Fr. Biallas, by now a respected Sinologist, had succeeded in winning renowned academics for collaboration on *Monumenta Serica*: the Europeans included the Belgian China missionary and distinguished Mongolist Antoine Mostaert C.I.C.M. (1881–1971), the Baltic Indologist and Sinologist Alexander von Staël-Holstein (1876–1937) along with two Germans, the Bonn-born art historian Gustav Ecke (1896–1971) and the Munich Indologist and academic librarian Ernst Schierlitz (1902–1940). On the Chinese side were found the already mentioned Chen Yuan, historian and president of Fu Jen University, the linguist Shen Jianshi 沈兼士 (1887–1947), the historian Zhang Xinglang 張星烺 (1888–1951) and the Anglist and secretary of the university Ying Qianli 英千里 (1900–1969). With this balanced composition of the editorial board, Fr. Biallas had made good his announcement of wanting to strengthen cooperation between Chinese and Europeans in Sinology.

What, then, did *Monumenta Serica* concretely feature? In his “Editorial Note,” editor Fr. Biallas writes that the journal aims to present material for research into the peoples, languages and cultures of China and its neighbouring peoples. He thus underlines the diversity and richness of Chinese culture as well as the significance of cultural exchange. Moreover, he adds, the journal should acknowledge ethnology and prehistory – two sciences still young at the time.⁴⁵ Biallas in no way emphasises that the journal is the project of Catholic missionaries. Examining the contents of all articles in the first 13 volumes published in Peking reveals an emphasis on history, philology and linguistics – that is, subjects also traditionally researched in China. Christianity and the Christian mission play only a small role.⁴⁶ It was a non-missionary, the French Sinologist Paul Pelliot, one of Biallas’s earlier academic teachers in Paris, who wrote a letter to the editors, published in the first volume, on the importance of missionaries as researchers of Chinese culture: when they lived in isolation in the country’s interior, he judged, they were especially predestined to research the dialects and customs, because they had close contacts with the local population.⁴⁷ An author of this sort, who did indeed provide *Monumenta Serica* with many important articles in its first years, was the Scheutveld missionary Antoine Mostaert: he was a member of the editorial board who had lived in the Ordos region of Mongolia for twenty years and contributed standard reference works on the local language as well as Mongolian history and folklore.⁴⁸

Monumenta Serica’s first issue – whose 243 pages comprised articles in English, German and French – received a warm reception in both academic circles and those of the S.V.D. mission itself. Even Bishop Henninghaus (who, as mentioned, thought little of Fr.

45 Biallas, “Editorial Note,” in: *Monumenta Serica* I (1935–1936), p. x.

46 See the content-related evaluation in Gumbrecht 1994, pp. 53–71.

47 Pelliot, “Letter to the Editor” (dated June 3, 1935), in: *Monumenta Serica* I (1935–1936), p. 192.

48 See the short biography and the index of his texts published in honour of his 60th birthday in *Monumenta Serica* X (1945), pp. i–iv.

Biallas) praised the journal as a “very successful publication,” one “worthy of our university” that allowed the editors and all contributors “to hold their heads up high.”⁴⁹

Even Biallas, meticulous editor that he was, seemed satisfied with his publication, for in April 1936 he wrote General Superior Grendel as follows:

*As for our new journal, I have heard good opinions from the most varied sides. This particularly pleases me on behalf of our university, which will of course profit the most from this success. We aim to do our best to enrich its contents as well as ensure its punctual publication. [...] The second issue is set to see the light of day in May.*⁵⁰

Unfortunately, Fr. Biallas would not live to witness this issue’s publication. He died on May 28, 1936 in Peking’s French Hospital of epidemic typhus. He had visited Fu Jen University’s Microbiological Laboratory, which was producing a serum against this disease, and apparently became infected by a pathogen.⁵¹ At the time of his death, he was only 57 years old. He died at the height of his academic output, leaving behind many works in manuscript form, still awaiting publication. On his sick bed, he entrusted his academic estate to the young Fr. Hermann Köster, a confrère at the university, and asked him to complete *Monumenta Serica*’s second issue, which he himself had almost finished editing, and send it to publication.

Two days after his death, Fr. Biallas was buried in Peking’s Zhalan 柵欄 Cemetery, the oldest Jesuit burial ground, not far from the graves of the famous China missionaries Matteo Ricci S.J. and Johann Adam Schall von Bell S.J. His gravestone did not survive the destructions inflicted on the cemetery in the 1950s and during the so-called Cultural Revolution. A photograph of the gravestone, however, still exists, showing it designed fully in keeping with Zhalan’s characteristic style, a mix of Western and Chinese elements, as does a stone rubbing of the grave’s inscription.⁵²

A Chinese specialist for tombstone inscriptions, Chen Xinyu 陈欣雨, discovered this stone rubbing a few years ago in a special collection of the Chinese National Library of China in Peking. Like with most of the cemetery’s other gravestones, the inscription consists of one Chinese and one Latin text, each with a short biographical note on the deceased (see the following page). Biallas’s Chinese name was Bao Runsheng 鮑潤生. The Chinese inscription provides more in-depth information on his career and academic work than the Latin one. Translated, it runs:

49 Augustin Henninghaus S.V.D. to Joseph Henkels S.V.D., letter no. 201, Kollár 2011, p. 565, translated. German original: “sehr gut gelungene Veröffentlichung,” [die] “unserer Universität würdig ist” [und mit der sich die Herausgeber und alle Mitarbeiter] “sehr gut sehen lassen können”.

50 Biallas to Grendel, letter no. 66, Kollár 2011, p. 363, translated. German original: “Über unsere neue Zeitschrift habe ich von verschiedenster Seite gute Urteile gehört. Das freut mich besonders wegen unserer Universität, die ja von dem Erfolg am meisten profitiert. Wir wollen unser Bestes tun, daß sie noch gehaltvoller wird und auch pünktlich erscheint [...]. Das zweite Heft wird im Mai das Licht erblicken.”

51 Descriptions of his death can be found in several letters written by his confrères, especially letters 205 (Henkels to Grendel), 206 (Köster to Grendel), 208 (Henkels to Grendel) and 210 (Köster to Henninghaus) in Kollár 2011.

52 An introduction to the history of this cemetery, which Western literature also calls “Chala” or “Shala” Cemetery, numerous images as well as selected translations of several epitaphs are given by Malatesta – Gao 1995.

Epitaph for Priest Bao, Society of the Divine Word:

Priest of the Society of the Divine Word, Mr. Bao, taboo name Runsheng, baptismal name Franz Xaver. Born 1878 in the Polish province of Silesia. Entered a seminary as a youth for his studies, became a member of the Society of the Divine Word in 1901. Ordained as a priest in 1905, he taught at seminaries of the German S.V.D. and subsequently studied Sinology in Berlin, Paris and other places, and was granted the doctoral title. He came to China in 1920 [sic!] and worked as missionary in Shandong Province, in Yanzhou and Qingdao. He also wrote works in Chinese and Western languages. His German translation of Songs of Chu was highly praised in expert circles. In the summer of 1933, he was charged with implementing the [S.V.D.] takeover of Fu Jen University in Beiping and taking on the position of Head of the university's sociology department, along with other duties. In 1935, he founded the journal Monumenta Serica and made many valuable contributions to Sinology. His character was open and honest. He was very well read, and respectful and pleasant company. Chinese scholars enjoyed maintaining contact with him. On 28 May 1936, he died in the French Hospital of Peking of an epidemic typhoid infection.⁵³

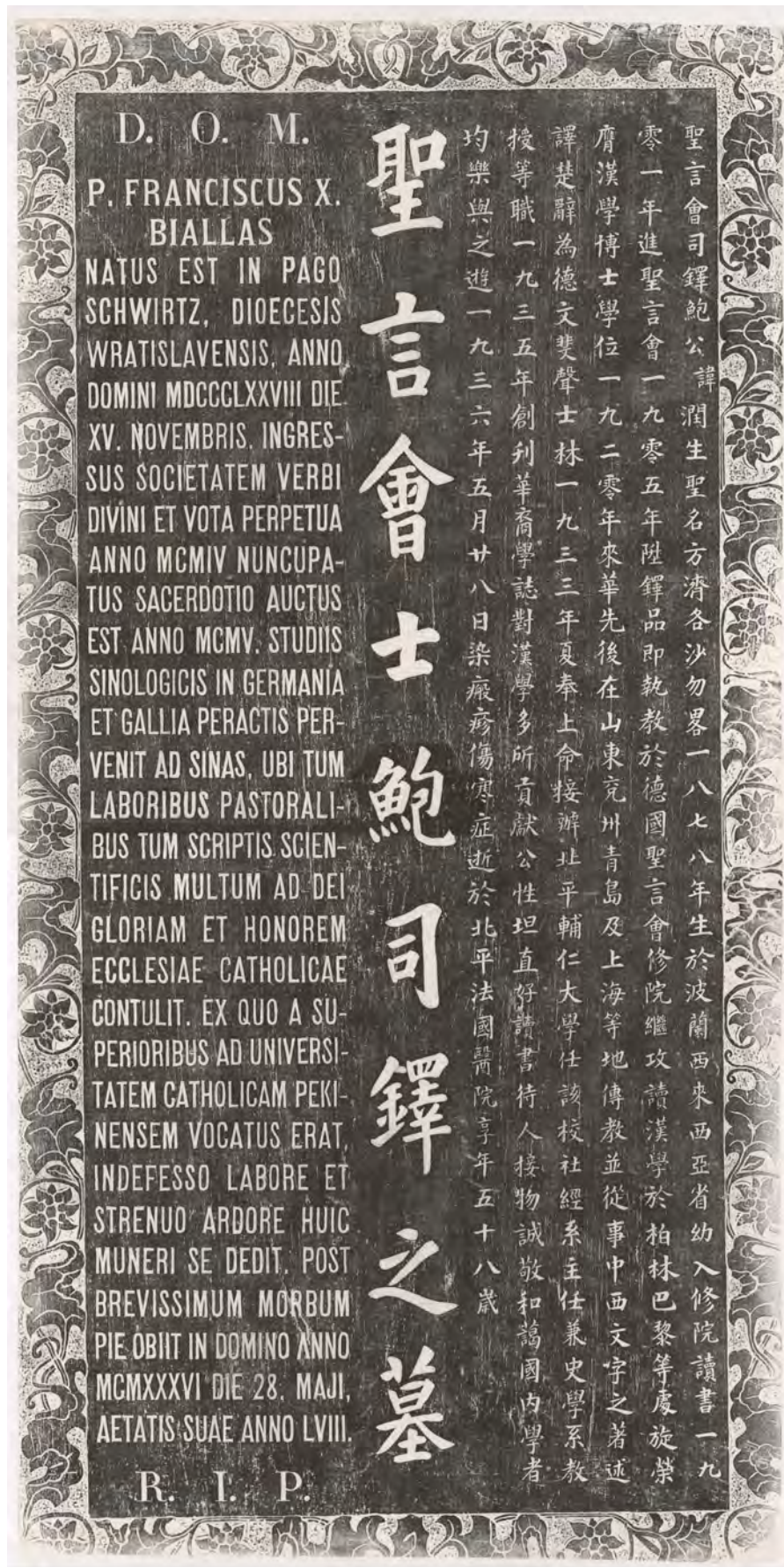
Although the Latin inscription notes his Sinological studies in Germany and France (“studiis sinologicis in Germania et Gallia peractis”) it makes no mention of his Sinological contributions, his personality or his contacts with Chinese colleagues. It only honours his untiring work and his vigorous passion (“indefesso labore et strenuo ardore”) for his duties at the Catholic university.⁵⁴

Although the personal letters of Fr. Biallas's confrères reveal shock and sorrow at his sudden death, the official reaction of the Divine Word mission in China was rather muted: the journal *Monumenta Serica* published no detailed obituary with an overview of his career and publications – as would have been usual in an academic context – but only a brief “Editorial Note” by his interim successor Fr. Hermann Köster, accompanied by the portrait photograph printed at the beginning of this essay.⁵⁵ In his note, Köster claimed that no more worthy “monument” could be erected for the deceased than continuing the journal he had founded in line with his editorial spirit. Apart from this short note, *Monumenta Serica*'s second issue also published a Chinese poem about Biallas by university president Chen Yuan and an annotated and rhyming English translation by Ying Qianli, Fu Jen

53 “聖言會士鮑司鐸之墓：聖言會司鐸鮑公，諱潤生，聖名方濟各·沙勿略。一八七八年生於波蘭西來西亞省。幼入修院讀書，一九零一年進聖言會，一九零五年陞鐸品，即執教於德國聖言會修院繼攻讀學，於柏林、巴黎等處旋榮膺漢學博士學位。一九二零年來華，先後在山東兗州、青島及上海等地傳教，並從事東西文字之著述，譯楚辭為德文裴聲士林，一九三三年夏奉命接辦北平輔仁大學任該校社經系主任兼史學系教授等職。一九三五年創刊華裔學志，對漢學多所貢獻。公性坦直，好讀書，待人接物誠敬和藹，國內學者均樂與之遊。一九三六年五月廿八日染癩疹傷寒症逝於北平法國醫院，享年五十八。” See the following figure. A historical photograph of the stele, the stone rubbing of the inscription as well as a transcription of the Chinese and Latin texts are found in Chen Xinyu 2020, pp. 492–494. The text of the Chinese epitaph has no punctuation, but was added in Chen's transcription.

54 The brevity of the Latin inscription compared with the Chinese one is also evident in other tombstone inscriptions in Zhalan Cemetery (see the translated examples in chap. 4, Malatesta – Gao 1995) and is presumably rooted in the varying conventions for these inscriptions.

55 *Monumenta Serica* I (1935–1936), unpaginated, before p. 245.



Latin-Chinese epitaph of Franz Xaver Biallas.

Source: National Library of China, inventory number 京 2170. Printed with kind permission.

University's secretary.⁵⁶ The poem, studded with numerous allusions and written in the manner of a classical seven-word verse (*qiyan jueju* 七言絕句), honours Biallas as translator of "Songs of Chu" and labels him the "Western Bao Shu" (*xilai Bao Shu* 西來鮑叔), a historical figure from Chinese antiquity who embodied the ideal friend. This comparison is particularly effective because Biallas and Bao Shu bore the same Chinese family name. The poem and its artful translation reveal a certain discrepancy between the respectful Chinese tribute to the deceased and the succinct Western response. It suggests that Biallas enjoyed a closer relationship with his Chinese colleagues than with his confrères.

The S.V.D. missionaries did indeed keep Fr. Köster's promise to carry on *Monumenta Serica* – despite many difficulties, the journal continued to be published and has already survived its founder by almost a century. In 2025, it celebrated its 90th anniversary. Another promise that Fr. Köster made in his short note, however, was not fulfilled: that of publishing the Sinological works Fr. Biallas had left behind, including a critical edition of *Chuci* and a Chinese grammar.⁵⁷ We do not know how developed these works already were, for Fr. Biallas's estate has been lost. It apparently first passed into the hands of Fr. Köster, as he writes in his "Note." Perhaps it then went missing in the turmoil of the S.V.D. missionaries' forced departure from China.

Under more auspicious circumstances, perhaps Franz Xaver Biallas would have joined the ranks of famous "missionary Sinologists"⁵⁸ – had he been able to publish more of his ambitious scholarly projects during his lifetime, or had his confrères published these works posthumously.

Although Franz Xaver Biallas cannot, today, be named in the same breath as famous Sinologists and missionaries like James Legge or Richard Wilhelm, whose translations of Chinese classics set new standards and continue to be read, he did make his Sinological mark in a few different ways. In the field of Chinese literature, especially research on "Songs of Chu," his name is still occasionally mentioned in modern secondary literature, Western and Chinese alike. The American Sinologist Paul Kroll credits Biallas with composing "the first serious study of the poem ["Yuan you"] in a Western language."⁵⁹ He praises Biallas's solid and reliable prose translation, and especially his helpful annotations.⁶⁰

A Chinese monograph from 2020 on *Chuci* research in Europe and America even dedicates an entire chapter to Fr. Biallas. The author Chen Liang 陳亮 honours Fr. Biallas as a pioneering researcher of the poems "Wandering Afar" and "Nine Songs" (*Jiu ge* 九歌).⁶¹ He stresses that Biallas, while researching the poem "Wandering Afar," closely examined a topical debate of the 1920s: the question of Qu Yuan's authorship, argued by the two Chi-

56 The Chinese calligraphy of Chen Yuan's poem is on the page across from Biallas's portrait photograph; the English translation is on the next page, across from Köster's "Editorial Note." *Monumenta Serica* 1 (1935–1936) 2, after p. 243 (unpag.).

57 Köster 1936, unpag. (before p. 245).

58 A term originating with Lauren Pfister; see Pfister 2010. The late American Sinologist David E. Mungello, too, calls Biallas a "missionary scholar," in his review of Kollár's book in *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal* 25 (2013), p. 84.

59 Kroll 2024, p. 437. An earlier version of this book chapter by Paul Kroll had already appeared in 1996, as an article in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*.

60 Kroll 2024, p. 438.

61 Chen Liang 2020, p. 276.

nese literary scholars Hu Shi 胡適 and Lu Kanru 陸侃如.⁶² This debate took place in the context of the intellectual movement of “doubting antiquity,” which called into question the authenticity of many classical Chinese works. Chen Liang emphasises appreciatively that Biallas convincingly rebuffed the arguments of the two “doubters” Hu and Lu and sided with the traditional view that Qu Yuan is to be viewed as *Chuci*’s author in general and the poem “Wandering Afar” in particular.⁶³ Chen Liang concludes by honouring Biallas as someone who nurtured close contacts with Chinese scholars and regretting that no one in China has as yet devoted a detailed article to him.⁶⁴

Alongside his *Chuci* research, Biallas’s book on Confucius also occasionally appears in more recent research on the topic: in their study of Confucianism’s renaissance in China today, for example, two French researchers praise Biallas’s work as an interesting contemporary description of Confucian rites. They even use two photographs that Biallas had taken in the Temple of Confucius for their own book, though without citing the source.⁶⁵

The traces Fr. Biallas left behind in Sinological research would certainly have been deeper had he been able to publish or complete his planned and initiated academic works. His planned full, critical translation of *Chuci* would especially have been a milestone in research on Chinese literature. The first English translation of this poetry collection was not published until the late 1950s;⁶⁶ had Biallas, as planned, published his complete German edition in the 1930s, he would have been a true pioneer in the Western translation of this important work of Chinese literature.

With *Monumenta Serica*’s foundation in 1935, Fr. Biallas realised an important aim: promoting Sinological research both at (the then-Catholic) Fu Jen University and within the S.V.D.⁶⁷ The journal was continued by the Monumenta Serica Institute, which following intervals in Japan and the USA has been headquartered in Germany since 1972. Yet despite this longstanding tradition of academic China research in the S.V.D., which only began with Fr. Biallas, the Society of the Divine Word spent decades failing to adequately honour its first academically trained Sinologist. In the years following *Monumenta Serica*’s brief announcement of Biallas’s death in 1936, his name appeared only on the journal’s title page, as its founder. It wasn’t until twenty years later, during the editorship of his successor’s successor, Fr. Heinrich Busch S.V.D. (1912–2002), that the journal once more made substantial reference to Fr. Biallas. By that time, political upheavals had long since pushed the journal’s editorial board out of Fu Jen Catholic University; after an interim of several years, the journal was brought back to life in Tokyo. In 1955, Fr. Busch wrote an “Editorial Note” for the resurrected journal: *Monumenta Serica*, he promised, was “now

62 On this, see Biallas 1927, pp. 71–100.

63 Chen Liang 2020, p. 280.

64 Chen Liang 2020, p. 284.

65 Billioud – Thoraval 2015, pp. 184–185, fn. 33 und fig. 7.1 and 7.2 (fig. 59 und 60 in Biallas 1928a).

66 David Hawkes, *Ch’u Tz’u: The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1959.

67 Another vision – that of improving the training of new missionaries by founding an “Institute of Oriental Studies” in Peking – was not implemented. Biallas had composed a lengthy memorandum on this subject in April 1936, shortly before his death; see Kollár 2011, pp. 364–376. This is apparently the last piece of writing Fr. Biallas ever penned.

finally ready to reappear [...] and serve once more the task set to it in 1935 by its founder, Fr. X. Biallas, S.V.D.”⁶⁸

At last, the Ph.D. thesis of Miroslav Kollár S.V.D. offered a thorough appreciation of Franz Xaver Biallas as a Sinologist and missionary. The thesis was submitted in 2006, at the S.V.D. missionaries' former Philosophical Theological Faculty in Sankt Augustin (which existed until 2021), and was published in 2011, in the Monumenta Serica Institute's book series *Collectanea Serica*. Alongside a biographical overview, this comprehensive work mostly presents important source material, especially around 300 transcribed and annotated letters to and by Fr. Biallas, the originals of which are stored in the S.V.D.'s general archive in Rome. The thesis subject was suggested by Fr. Kollár's doctoral supervisor, Fr. Roman Malek S.V.D. (1951–2019), who in 1992 succeeded Heinrich Busch as *Monumenta Serica's* editor.

Despite the S.V.D.'s many years of failing to give Fr. Biallas his dues, this Sinologist fulfilled an important function for the S.V.D. missionaries: by founding the journal *Monumenta Serica*, from which the eponymous institute later sprang, he set the cornerstone for S.V.D.'s continuous academic China research. The society has consistently trained the next generation of academia for both the journal and the institute. Fr. Busch, Fr. Malek and many other S.V.D. members were marked out for Sinological studies, some at renowned universities like Columbia University in New York, and could thus carry on Fr. Biallas's academic legacy. The conflict between the roles of missionary and academic that had shaped Fr. Biallas's life in China was one his successors no longer personally faced, for their duties lay first and foremost in Sinological endeavours. They either worked within the Monumenta Serica Institute, editing Sinological publications, or taught at various universities and published their own works. They all played their part in making the Society of the Divine Word one of the few Catholic religious and missionary societies to foster a tradition of autonomous China research and publishing and thereby live up to high academic standards.

References

- Biallas, Franz Xaver 1927, “K'üh Yüans 'Fahrt in die Ferne' (Yüan-yu),” in: *Asia Major*, vol. 4, pp. 50–107.
- 1928a, *Konfuzius und sein Kult: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte Chinas und ein Führer zur Heimatstadt des Konfuzius*, Peking – Leipzig: Peking Verlag.
- 1928b, “K'u Yüan, His Life and Poems,” in: *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. LIX, pp. 231–253.
- 1932, “K'üh Yüans 'Fahrt in die Ferne' (Yüan-yu) II,” in: *Asia Major*, vol. 7, pp. 179–241.
- Billioud, Sébastien – Joël Thoraval 2015, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China*, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁸ Busch 1949–1955.

- Busch, Heinrich 1949–1955, “Editorial Note,” in: *Monumenta Serica*, vol. XIV, unpagged (before p. I).
- Chen Liang 陈亮 2020, *Ou Mei Chuci xue lun gang* 欧美楚辞学论纲, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
- Chen Xinyu 陈欣雨 2020, *Chunqiu shi ming – Beijing Zhalan mudi lishi ji xiancun beiwen kao* 春秋石铭—北京栅栏墓地历史及现存碑文考 / *The History on the Tombstones: Research on the History and Inscriptions of Chala Cemetery*, Beijing: Renmin chubanshe.
- Clart, Philip 2016, “Eduard Erkes und die Leipziger Forschung zur chinesischen Religionsgeschichte,” in: Steffi Richter – Philip Clart – Martin Roth (eds.), *100 Jahre Ostasiatisches Institut an der Universität Leipzig, 1914–2014*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, pp. 71–91.
- Gumbrecht, Cordula 1994, *Die Monumenta Serica: eine sinologische Zeitschrift und ihre Redaktionsbibliothek in ihrer Peking Zeit (1935–1945 [sic])*. Köln: Greven.
- Harnisch, Thomas 1999, *Chinesische Studenten in Deutschland: Geschichte und Wirkung ihrer Studienaufenthalte in den Jahren von 1860 bis 1945*, Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde Hamburg, no. 300, Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde.
- Hoster, Barbara 2018, “Konfuzius und sein Kult (Confucius and His Cult, 1928): A Monograph by the Catholic China Missionary Franz Xaver Biallas S.V.D. as a Contribution to Sinology,” in: *Monumenta Serica*, vol. LXVI, no. 1, pp. 131–160.
- Hu, Anthony 2023, “Neo-Missionaries in Republican China: A Study of Selected Training Materials Mostly in Bilingual Format for the Divine Word Missionaries in Shandong,” in: *Religions & Christianity in Today's China*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, pp. 27–58.
- Kern, Martin – Stephen Owen (eds.) 2024, *Qu Yuan and the Chuci: New Approaches*, Leiden – Boston: Brill.
- Köster, Hermann 1936, “Editorial Note,” in: *Monumenta Serica*, vol. I, no. 2, unpagged (before p. 245).
- Kollár, Miroslav 2011, *Ein Leben im Konflikt: P. Franz Xaver Biallas SVD (1878–1936). Chinamissionar und Sinologe im Licht seiner Korrespondenz*, Collectanea Serica, Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica.
- Kreiner, Josef 1989, “Zur 100. Wiederkehr der Gründung des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen, Berlin/Bonn,” in: *Orientierungen*, vol. 1, pp. 1–24.
- Kroll, Paul W. 2024, “On ‘Far Roaming’ Again,” in: Kern – Owen 2024, pp. 434–467.
- Leeb, Leo, SVD 2025, “1882: The Mission in China Viewed through the Prism of the First Two Pioneers,” in: Miotk – Lazar – de Rivera 2025, pp. 53–61.
- Leege, James 1861, *The Chinese Classics. Vol. 1. Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean*. 2nd. ed., revised, Hong Kong – London: Trübner.
- Malatesta, Edward J., S.J. – Gao Zhiyu (eds.) 1995, *Departed, Yet Present: Zhalan, the Oldest Christian Cemetery in Beijing*, Macau – San Francisco: Instituto Cultural de Macau – Ricci Institute, University of San Francisco.
- Miotk, Andrzej, SVD – Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar SVD – Crescente de Rivera SVD 2025, *Treasures of the Past and Experiences of the Present: In Commemoration of the*

- 150th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Society of the Divine Word (1875–2025)*, Rome: Apud Collegium Verbi Divini.
- Mohrbacher, Andreas 1926, “Die historische Entwicklung des Confucius-Kultus,” in: *Jahrbuch von St. Gabriel*, vol. 2. Ed. by Philosophisch-Theologische Lehranstalt St. Gabriel. St. Gabriel, Mödling bei Wien: Verlag der Missionsbuchhandlung, pp. 201–251.
- Pfister, Lauren 2010, “China’s Missionary-Scholars,” in: R.G. Tiedemann (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume 2: 1800 to the Present*, Leiden et al.: Brill, pp. 742–765.
- Rivinius, Karl Josef 1993, *Traditionalismus und Modernisierung: Das Engagement von Bischof Augustin Henninghaus auf dem Gebiet des Bildungs- und Erziehungswesens in China (1904–1914)*, Veröffentlichungen des Missionspriesterseminars St. Augustin bei Bonn, vol. 44, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag.
- 2013, *Das Projekt einer katholischen Enzyklopädie für China*, Sankt Augustin: Steyler Verlag.
- 2016, *Bildungsoffensive: P. Wilhelm Schmidt SVD in Ostasien (1935)*, Studia Instituti Missiologici Societas Verbi Divini, vol. 106, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag.
- Schmiedl, Joachim 2009, “Weltmission und religiöse Orden im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Trends und Deutungen im Spiegel der Forschung,” in: *Historisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 129, pp. 479–500.
- Schütte, Hans Wilm 2002, *Die Asienwissenschaften in Deutschland: Geschichte, Stand und Perspektiven*, Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde.
- Tiedemann, R.G. 2009, *Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, Armonk, NY – London: Sharpe.
- Weber-Schäfer, Peter 1967, *Altchinesische Hymnen: Aus dem “Buch der Lieder” und den “Gesängen von Ch’u”*, Köln: Jakob Hegner.

In memoriam

Frank Joseph Shulman (1943–2026)

Barbara Hoster

Translated by Anna Clart

On May 9, 2026, the American scholar of Asian Studies, librarian, and bibliographer Frank Joseph Shulman passed away in College Park, Maryland. Professional circles will remember his name above all for his bibliographies of Asian Studies dissertations, such as *Doctoral Dissertations on China and on Inner Asia, 1976–1990* (1998), and for his long-standing work on the *Bibliography of Asian Studies*, to which he and his wife Anna Leon Shulman served as long-time editors. He was particularly interested in the history of Judaism in China, as well as in Sino-Israeli relations.

Shulman was born on September 20, 1943 in Boston. After initial studies in European and Jewish history at Harvard University, he turned to Asian history. He earned master's degrees in Far Eastern Studies in 1968 and Library Science in 1969, both at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He had also spent a year studying at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and later learned Japanese in Tokyo to qualify for admission to a PhD program in Japanese history at his alma mater in Ann Arbor. It was over the course of these doctoral studies that he discovered his true calling: becoming a bibliographer. 1970 saw his first publication in this field, *Japan and Korea: An Annotated Bibliography of Doctoral Dissertations in Western Languages, 1877–1969*; many more were to follow, including those named above. From 1976 to 2001, he worked as librarian and head of the East Asian department of College Park Libraries, at the University of Maryland. From 1997 to 2021, he also worked as co-editor of the *Bibliography of Asian Studies*, an indispensable resource for Western research on Asia.

Frank Joseph Shulman's interest in Judaism in China was connected to his own family origins: His parents were the descendants of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania. In addition to several bibliographic articles he composed on this subject, including the one published in Jonathan Goldstein's (ed.) *The Jews of China, Volume 2: A Sourcebook and Research Guide* (2000), he regularly disseminated current related news through a larger email distribution list, to which the author of this obituary herself subscribed. His response to personal inquiries about specific research questions was consistently prompt and helpful. He was happy to adopt bibliographic suggestions on the topic of Jews in China and shared these further through the abovenamed distribution list.

Shulman had many more publication projects planned for his retirement, including a bibliography on dissertations about Korea from 1903 to 2004. A cancer diagnosis denied him the chance to complete this reference work, which had already grown to encompass multiple volumes at the time of his passing.

Sources:

Frank F. Conlon, „In Memoriam: Frank Joseph Shulman (1943–2026),“ website of the Association for Asian Studies, www.asianstudies.org/in-memoriam-frank-joseph-shulman-1943-2026.

Frank Joseph Shulman, „My Personal Life and Professional Career in Asian Studies: An Autobiographical Account and Guide to Selected Reference and Resource Materials“ (June–July 2022), unpublished autobiographical text (123 pages).

Imprint – Legal Notice

ISSN 2192-9289

Publisher:

China-Zentrum e.V.
Arnold-Janssen-Str. 22
53757 Sankt Augustin
Germany

Managing editors:

Katharina Feith, Dr. Katrin Fiedler,
Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

Assistant editor and layout:

Eveline Warode

Web editors:

Jan Kwee, Ketty Nguyen

Collaborators of this issue:

Anna Clart, London
Fr. David Streit SVD, Techny/USA

Calligraphy:

Yang Xusheng

Editorial submission deadline:

August 18, 2026

Contact:

China-Zentrum e.V.
Arnold-Janssen-Str. 22
53757 Sankt Augustin
Germany
Phone: +49 (0) 2241 237 432
Fax: +49 (0) 2241 205 841
www.china-zentrum.de

Bank account:

Name of the bank: Steyler Bank GmbH
Bank address: Arnold-Janssen-Str. 22,
53757 Sankt Augustin, Germany
Account holder: China-Zentrum e.V.
Account number: 17 881
Bank code: 386 215 00
IBAN DE 94 3862 1500 0000 0178 81
BIC GENODED1STB

Religions & Christianity in Today's China is an e-journal published four times a year. It is freely available on the website of the China-Zentrum, www.china-zentrum.de. Part of the contributions of each issue are translated from *China heute. Informationen über Religion und Christentum im chinesischen Raum*, the German language journal of the China-Zentrum.

The articles and news items featured do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publisher.

The articles of the Journal **Religions & Christianity in Today's China** are copyrighted and must be treated like any other published articles. Users may read, download, copy, distribute, print, search or link to the texts of these articles for personal or academic purposes. Reprints in other media and all commercial uses must receive prior written authorization from the editors.

For the publication of **Religions & Christianity in Today's China** the China-Zentrum is dependent on the generosity of its friends and readers. In order to help us cover inevitable costs, we ask that you consider sending in a voluntary contribution. If you so wish, for tax purposes we can issue you a receipt for your donation that will be recognized by German tax authorities.

