

Religions  
& Christianity  
in Today's  
China

Vol. VII 2017 No. 3

中國宗教評論



## Contents

Editorial | 2

News Update on Religion and Church in China

March 28 – July 7, 2017 | 3

Compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber and Katharina Feith

Invisible and Invincible:

Changing Female Roles in the Chinese Protestant Church  
and Their Perceptions | 22

Katrin Fiedler

“The Monastery Will Be a Chinese House”:

The Inculturation of the Church in China from the Perspective  
of the History of Catholic Monasticism | 41

Matteo Nicolini-Zani

Imprint – Legal Notice | 54

## Editorial

Dear Readers,

We are happy to present to you the third issue for the year 2017 of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* (中国宗教评论).

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

In her article “Invisible and Invincible: Changing Female Roles in the Chinese Protestant Church and Their Perceptions,” Dr. Katrin Fiedler explores the dynamics between traditional and modern religious roles and the importance of gender differences in the ongoing growth of Christian churches in China. She also makes suggestions for a future research agenda concerning the role of women in the Chinese Protestant church.

Matteo Nicolini-Zani, a monk of the Community of Bose in Italy, in his article “‘The Monastery Will Be a Chinese House’: The Inculturation of the Church in China from the Perspective of the History of Catholic Monasticism” gives an interesting insight into the history of the Christian monastic presence in China between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, taking the Benedictine Monastery of Xishan (Sichuan) as a case study.

*Religions & Christianity in Today's China* is freely available on the website of the China-Zentrum, [www.china-zentrum.de](http://www.china-zentrum.de). Additionally, readers who subscribe to *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* will regularly receive e-mail updates providing web links to the contents of each newly published issue.

The China-Zentrum is a non-profit organization. For the publication of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* we are dependent on the generosity of our friends and readers. In order to help us cover inevitable costs, we would be very grateful if you could consider sending a voluntary contribution.

*Sankt Augustin, August 2017*

*The Editors*

## News Update on Religion and Church in China March 28 – July 7, 2017

Compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber and Katharina Feith  
Translated by David Streit

*The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum ([www.china-zentrum.de](http://www.china-zentrum.de)). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2017, No. 2, pp. 3-21) covered the period November 13, 2016 – March 29, 2017.*

### Religious Policy

May 2017:

#### Video by the Communist Youth League: “What if atheism were a religion?”

According to the magazine *The Diplomat*, the Chinese Communist Youth League has been increasingly active in trying to influence young people in China. The magazine recently posted a video on its Weibo account propagating atheism under the title: “What if atheism were a religion?” (如果无神也是一种宗教). Evidently the same video was posted on YouTube on May 5; the credits list the propaganda department of the Youth League as the producer. In the satirical video, a young man encounters a group of atheists clad in white robes. Their “pastor” introduces him to their “atheistic religion,” whose adherents venerate scientists and philosophers as saints, recite the laws of physics, and pray for food to the “Almighty Self.” In the 2nd part of the video, professors of China’s top universities and other well-known personalities explain their atheistic convictions (*The Diplomat* May 13; the Video can be seen on YouTube at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0kPxXhd6w4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0kPxXhd6w4)).

### Religions in General

End of June 2017:

#### National training institutes of the various religions celebrate the graduates of 2017

43 graduates of the Chinese Buddhist Academy in Beijing received their Bachelor’s degrees on June 25. Also in Beijing, on June 27, the Chinese Koran Institute awarded Bachelor’s degrees to 29 graduates from three different ethnic groups: Hui, Uyghurs, and Kazakhs.

On June 30, the Protestant Nanjing Union Theological Seminary conferred 92 B.A.s and 17 M.A.s on 109 men and women. On June 29, 24 Catholic seminarians from 16 dioceses completed their seven-year study of theology with a B.A. at the National Seminary of the Catholic Church in China located in Beijing. A few days before their respective graduation ceremonies, the graduates of both the Protestant and the Catholic national seminary had separate receptions in the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). SARA Vice Director Zhang Yantong extended congratulations and best wishes, together with political admonitions for their future activities. He also gave each of the graduates a gift of money.

As reported in Chinese State media, already on April 4, 2017, at the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, ten monks of the Gelug school had passed the exam for the highest level of the study of Tibetan Buddhism, the Geshe Lharangba (chinacatholic.cn July 5; chinainislam.net.cn June 28; njuts.cn July 4; *Renminwang* April 7; sara.gov.cn June 19, 27; zgfx.cn June 25).

Each of the five recognized religions has an official “national” institute for religious education, which is promoted as a political priority. The degrees awarded by these national and regional institutes for religious education have in recent years been standardized across the nation, although they are recognized only within the respective religious circles. In addition, there are also unofficial systems of religious education and formation in the “underground.”

## Buddhism

April 8, 2017:

### Tawang: The Dalai Lama speaks out on the question of his reincarnation

From April 8–10, the 14th Dalai Lama was in Tawang in the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh, not far from the border with Bhutan and the People’s Republic of China, to deliver a series of teachings. In a press conference on April 8, he described as “nonsense” the Chinese government’s claim to be competent to decide on his reincarnation. He said that nobody knew where his reincarnation will be born; “I sometimes doubt if I’m even the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama.” It is up to the Tibetan people to decide whether there will be a next Dalai Lama, he declared. He mentioned that later this year he may resume discussions with prominent Tibetan spiritual leaders on how to proceed [with regard to his reincarnation].

In the weeks leading up to the trip, China had threatened India with serious consequences should it allow the Dalai Lama to travel to Tawang, which China regards as part of its territory. Tawang is also the birthplace of the 6th Dalai Lama. Robert J. Barnett, a Tibet expert at Columbia University, told the *New York Times* that in some cases aging Tibetan lamas had visited places where they would later be reborn. According to Barnett, the visits of the Dalai Lama to Tawang and Mongolia (in November 2016, see *RCTC* 2017, No. 1, pp. 7-8) seemed to fall into this pattern (dalailama.com April 8; *New York Times* April 7; *Voice of America* April 9).

April 9, 2017:

### “Second Summit Forum of Theravada Buddhism” held in Dehong, Yunnan Province

The gathering featured lectures by representatives of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, of Thailand’s Chulalongkorn University, of the Theravada University of Rangoon (Myanmar) as well as of

the Chinese Buddhist Association. The highlight of the second day of the summit was a Theravada Buddhist ordination ceremony. The first Summit Forum of Theravada Buddhism was held in 2016, in Xishuangbanna (sara.gov.cn April 12).

In the People's Republic of China, the Mahayana school is the prevalent form of Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism of the Hinayana school, common throughout most of Southeast Asia, is the principal form of Buddhism only in China's Yunnan Province.

April 12, 2017:

## Newly-founded “Nanhai Buddhist Academy” on the southern Chinese island of Hainan begins drive to enroll students – Indian newspaper speaks of significant victory of China’s “soft diplomacy”

Already at the Bo'ao Forum of 2016, Master Yinshun, Vice Chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association and Chairman of the Buddhist Association of Hainan, had announced that the new Nanhai Buddhist Academy (南海佛学院, translated “Buddhist Academy of the South China Sea”) will begin enrolling student monks and nuns of the Theravada, the Tibetan and the Han Chinese schools of Buddhism from all the countries bordering the South China Sea (Nanhai) for the school year beginning in September of 2017. According to the academy's official website (www.nhfx.net), the goal of the new university, officially approved by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), is to foster cultural understanding and religious exchange with neighboring countries and to serve the goals of China's state policy known by the motto “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR, i.e., the “New Silk Road”). The new university will offer its first 220 students (monks, nuns, and lay people) a basic four-year undergraduate curriculum in several courses, including courses on Buddhist music, art and architecture, temple management and social work. The 11th Panchen Lama, installed and backed by the Chinese Government, is one of the school's honorary rectors. The campus, which extends in an impressive way on the southern coast of Hainan down to the sea (see the designs on the school's website), is scheduled to be completed by late 2018.

According to an article about him on the SARA website, the rector of the new academy, Master Yinshun (born 1974), advocates a “South China Sea strategy,” i.e. more exchange with Southeast Asian Buddhist circles in the service of China's overall strategy. Master Yinshun, who holds a PhD degree and who maintains contacts in many Asian countries, is the abbot of a number of monasteries, including (since 2011) the Chinese Zhonghua Temple (中华寺) in Lumbini, birth place of the historical Gautama Buddha in Nepal.

According to *The New Indian Express*, with the opening of the new Nanhai Buddhism Academy, China has taken over the “vacant Buddhist diplomacy space” which was generated by India's slow progress with its planned construction of a new Buddhist Nalanda University in Bihar. The newspaper writes that the new academy has close links to the Buddhist centers in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Cambodia, which the paper sees as an attempt to completely sideline the Indian side in soft diplomacy, “usurping the Buddhist legacy of India.” According to *The New Indian Express*, China is also “aggressively” promoting Lumbini as a Buddhist pilgrimage site with the aim of countering the attraction of the two sites of Sarnath and Bodhgaya in India, where Gautama Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment (nhfx.net; *The New Indian Express* June 5; sara.gov.cn March 28; July 6).

May 3, 2017:

## Buddha in the diplomatic service – Celebrating Buddha’s birthday in Beijing and Hong Kong

The Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) held a festival in honor of Buddha’s birthday at Beijing’s Lingguang Temple where a tooth of Buddha is revered as one of China’s two Buddha relics (the second being a finger of Buddha in the Famen Temple in Shaanxi). As reported on the website of the CBA, the celebration was planned to commemorate Buddha’s birth as well as to spread the excellent traditional culture of China and “to create a good international atmosphere for China’s strategy of ‘One Belt, One Road’ [OBOR, i.e. the new Silk Road].” According to the report, more than a thousand people gathered at the Lingguang Temple, in addition to Buddhists from all over China including also ambassadors and diplomatic representatives from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Three Vice-Chairmen of the CBA, representing the three branches of Buddhism in China (i.e. the Chinese, Tibetan and Theravada branches of Buddhism), joined together to lead the recitation of the Sutras and the veneration of the Buddha. A representative of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) read out a congratulatory telegram on behalf of this government department.

On May 3 in Hong Kong – where Buddha’s birthday (Vesak) is a public holiday – a big blessing ceremony was held at the Coliseum to mark the 2,561st birthday of the Buddha and to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the return of Hong Kong to China. In addition to Buddhist dignitaries, among whom were the President of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association and two Vice Presidents of the CBA, ordinary Buddhist faithful as well as political representatives from Beijing and Hong Kong were also on hand for the event. In his address to the crowd, SARA Vice Director Jiang Jianyong paid tribute to the contributions which Buddhists have made to the welfare of Hong Kong and exhorted them to continue to develop their spirit of the “love of country and of Hong Kong” (*ai guo ai Gang*) ([chinabuddhism.com.cn](http://chinabuddhism.com.cn) May 3; [sara.gov.cn](http://sara.gov.cn) May 8).

May 19, 2017:

## Young Tibetan monk in Qinghai sets fire to himself in protest – His was the 150th self-immolation since 2009 and the fourth this year

The 22 year old Buddhist monk, Jamyang Losel, set fire to himself in the County of Jianzha (Tibetan: Chentsa) in the Huangnan (Tibetan: Malho) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province. He was rushed to the hospital but later died of his burns. According to the International Campaign for Tibet, this year alone (2017) four Tibetans in the People’s Republic of China have set fire to themselves in protest, including one only 16 years old, who called for freedom for Tibet and for the return of the Dalai Lama. Overall, the wave of self-immolations, which began in 2011, has somewhat declined in recent years, also due to massive countermeasures by the authorities ([tchrd.org](http://tchrd.org) May 20; a list of those who have set fire to themselves can be found at: [www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans](http://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans)).

June 29-30, 2017:

## Conference on “Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism along the ‘One Belt, One Road (OBOR)’” in the Po Lin Monastery at Hong Kong



The Tian Tan Buddha on Lantau Island. Photo: Jakub Hałun 2009, Wikimedia Commons.

160 postgraduate monks and researchers in Buddhism participated in the conference, organized by, among others, the Po Lin Monastery, by relevant institutions of the Nanjing University, Hong Kong University, Hong Kong Chinese University and the Hong Kong Baptist University, as well as the Mahachula Buddhist University in Thailand. Master Xuecheng, Chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association, said in his address to the group that the Theravada and Mahayana branches of Buddhism along the Silk Road had originally been one

integral whole. He said that it was only through enhanced mutual recognition and cooperation [of the two main Buddhist branches], that Buddhist teachings would be able to reach more people and contribute to the birth of a new world civilization marked by a deep consciousness of unity. Jiang Jianyong, Deputy Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, also addressed the participants.

On the morning of June 29 there was a big blessing ceremony in the Po Lin Monastery to mark “20 years since the return of Hong Kong [to China] as well as the 25th anniversary of the erection of the Tian Tan Buddha.” The 34-meter high Buddha statue stands near the Po Lin Monastery on the island of Lantau ([chinabuddhism.com.cn](http://chinabuddhism.com.cn) June 30; [sara.gov.cn](http://sara.gov.cn) July 4).

## Daoism

May 10–12, 2017:

### Fourth International Taoism Forum held in the Wudang mountains

According to Chinese media, 600 guests from 30 countries took part in the meeting, held in the Wudang mountains of Hubei Province, one of the holy places of Daoism. The forum was organized by the State-supported Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) and the China Religious Culture Communication Association (CRCCA), an organization under the umbrella of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). This government sponsorship, as for the previous forums, lent a very official note to the proceedings. At the end, the participants adopted a declaration in which they advocated, among other things, a contemporary interpretation of Daoism, as well as its global spread. The First International Taoism Forum took place in October 2011 in Nanyue in Hunan Province (see: *RCTC* 2012, No. 1, pp. 10-11).

According to a report on the website of the Chiesa Taoista d'Italia (Daoist Church of Italy) the official preparatory meeting for the founding of a World Taoist Federation (世界道教联合会) took place on May 12, 2017, with Master Li Guangfu, Chairman of the Chinese Daoist Association, presiding; for more on this subject, see the article in *China heute* 2017, No. 2, p. 72 (in German) (<http://daoxie.daoisms.org/xinwenzixun/xinwenjujiao/2017-05-13/2417.html> [bi-lingual text of the declaration]; <http://daoxie.daoisms.org/s/4djl/> [official website of the forum]; [www.daoitaly.org/2017.html](http://www.daoitaly.org/2017.html) May 12).

## Popular Religion

July 1–7, 2017:

### Statue of the sea goddess Mazu travels on the “Silk Road of the Sea” from Meizhou Island to Kuala Lumpur and on to Singapore

The island of Meizhou, lying off the coast of Fujian province, is regarded as the birthplace of the historic Mazu (i.e. of the girl Lin Moniang). The goddess Mazu is commonly invoked as the patron deity of fishermen and sailors. Travelling by plane, the statue of the goddess from the Mazu Temple of Meizhou was accompanied by the statues of two helper deities and a delegation of 130 persons, including teams for the performance of “Popular Culture.”

As reported in the Singapore *Straits Times*, on July 5 the statue of Mazu from Meizhou was carried in procession to seven different temples in Singapore and was then finally set up in the Mazu temple of Thian Hock Keng. There, the goddess was worshipped the next morning in a festive ceremony, to which many of Singapore's 38 Mazu temples had also brought along their own statues of Mazu.

According to the official Chinese news portal chinanews.com, the tour was under the theme of “Cultural Exchange of the Mazu Culture in the Spirit of the Silk Road,” and thus within the context of the national project “One Belt, One Road.” Almost three quarters of the population of Singapore are of Chinese descent (*AsiaNews* July 5; chinanews.com June 6; straitstimes.com July 6).

## Islam

April / May / June, 2017:

### Radio Free Asia reports on pressure on religious life in Xinjiang exerted by various government measures, including the placing of cadres in Muslim families during Ramadan

As reported by the American broadcaster *Radio Free Asia*, which cited local sources, the measures taken by the regime against religious fasting during Ramadan (May 26 to June 24) were even sharper this year than in previous years. So this year in Hotan, government cadres were reported to have been stationed for 15 days in Muslim families in various villages, mainly in order to prevent them from observing the Ramadan fast.

Furthermore, according to *Radio Free Asia*, in the middle of January, the inhabitants of Barin Township in Kashgar Prefecture were informed that they were required to turn in all editions of the Qu'ran published before 2012 – including those published with government approval – on the grounds that they contained “some signs of extremism.”

In addition, *RFA* reported on June 1 that according to a decree from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region's Public Security Bureau, Uighur parents were ordered to legally change all "overly religious" names – such as Islam, Koran, Mecca, Jihad, Imam, Saddam or Hajj – of children under 16 years of age; parents who refused to comply with this order were threatened with the loss of their children's household registration (*hukou*), which gives access to health care and education.

The Chinese state-controlled newspaper *Global Times* reported on April 11 that the party chief of a village in Hotan, Xinjiang, had been demoted because he "did not dare" to smoke in the presence of religious figures. *The Global Times* quoted another official from Hotan as saying that the party chief's behavior was indicative of "extreme religious thinking" (*Global Times* April 11; *Radio Free Asia* May 25, 26; June 1, 8).

April 6–7, 2017:

## Conference on mosque architecture deals with the problem of "imitating foreign models"



Old mosques of the Chinese-speaking Hui Muslims were mostly built in the style of Chinese temples, such as the great mosque of Xi'an from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) (top). Newer mosques, such as this one in the Province of Henan (bottom), tend to be built in the style favored in Arabic countries. Photos: Ariane Reimers.



A conference in Xi'an, organized by the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA), the official umbrella organization of Islam in China, has called for mosque buildings in China to be adapted to the situation in the country and built in a Chinese style. Furthermore, mosques are to be practical buildings and should be built economically; excessive size and splendor are to be avoided. According to the conference report, which appeared on the websites of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) and the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA), throughout history Islam in China had oriented itself toward traditional Chinese construction and had developed a style of mosque with Chinese characteristics, something which shows the high grade of identification of Chinese Muslims with Chinese culture. In the last ten years, however, a tendency to "Arabize" had surfaced in the construction of Chinese mosques, with the inclination to compete in size and grandeur and to build mosques larger than had been envisioned in original building permits, the conference report said. Zhang Yantong, one of the Deputy Directors of the SARA, explained at the conference that the problem of blind imitation of foreign models in mosque construction was due to a lack of consciousness, and stressed the necessity to adhere to the basic direction of the

Sinicization of Islam. He added that mosques ought not to be built with the idea of turning them into tourist destinations. Representatives of Islamic associations as well as experts took part in the conference (chinainislam.net.cn April 8; sara.gov.cn April 7).

April 12, 2017:

### The “Xinjiang class” of the Chinese Koran Institute receives a visit from the director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA)

After a hiatus of 15 years, 2016 saw the establishment once again of a “Xinjiang class” in the Chinese Koran Institute in Beijing, the central educational institute in China of official Islam. According to a report on the website of the SARA, twenty-four students from different prefectures of the Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang were admitted to the 5-year course. SARA director Wang Zuo’an told the students from Xinjiang that the Central Committee of the party paid the greatest attention to the Xinjiang work, and especially to the training of young Islamic talent. He exhorted them to study well and to become “really good Islamic clerics, who are politically reliable, morally convincing in their character and morals, have good religious knowledge and an impact in decisive moments,” by displaying among other things a clear stand against all religious extremism. Wang called on the Koran Institute to take good care of the students from Xinjiang and to actively encourage and promote their contacts with the students from other parts of China (sara.gov.cn April 13).

## Christianity

May 15, 2017:

### New online platform on Christianity in China

According to a press release of May 15th, researchers now have access to “the worldwide largest online Collection on Christianity in China.” The “Online Chinese Christianity Collection” (OCCC) is jointly operated by the Kingdom Business College in Beijing and Globethics.net in Geneva, Switzerland. According to the press report, “Over 34,500 full text documents, multilingual and for free can be downloaded on [www.chinesechristianity.online](http://www.chinesechristianity.online).” Two-thirds of the texts available to date are in Chinese, the remainder are in English, German, French and other languages. The following are listed as academic partners and institutes from which the texts in the collection have been drawn: China National Knowledge Infrastructure, Beijing; Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, Hong Kong; Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong; Fujian Theological Seminary, Fuzhou; Hong Kong Baptist University; Nanjing Union Theological Seminary; Yale Divinity School at Yale University; China Information Desk, Hamburg; China-Zentrum, Sankt Augustin; Sino-Western Studies, Finland; Foundation of Theological Education in South-East Asia and, finally, Open Access Repositories (globethics.net May 15; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* May 17; *UCAN* May 29).

## Catholic Church

March 28–29, 2017:

### Conference in Nanchang: “Matteo Ricci and Nanchang: Sinicization and Inculturation of the Catholic Church”

The Conference was jointly organized by the Diocese of Jiangxi, the Catholic Faith Institute for Cultural Studies (FICS) in Shijiazhuang and two institutes of Fudan University in Shanghai: the Institute for Globalization and Religious Studies and the Xu-Ricci Dialogue Institute. The researchers presenting papers came from a number of universities and from the ranks of the Christian churches: some of them from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Italy (including a Professor of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome) and the United States. Representatives from the State Administration for Religious Affairs as well as some local authorities were also on hand. Most of the papers dealt with an analysis of Christianity and Chinese culture in the history of Christian missionary activity in China, in particular at the time of the China missionary Matteo Ricci SJ (1552–1610). In his paper, Father Zhang Shijiang, Director of the FICS, pointed to a recent survey regarding the attitude of Christians to ancestor worship; the survey was conducted simultaneously by two Chinese Church newspapers, the Catholic *Xinde* (Faith Weekly) and the Protestant *Jidu shibao* (Christian Times) (for more information on the results of this survey see *China heute* 2017, No. 2, pp. 72-73 [in German]). In her conclusion to the conference, Fan Lizhu of Fudan University rated the conference as a successful start of cooperation between religious and scientific circles regarding the research into the inculturation of the Church in China (*Xinde* No. 718, April 9).

April 6 / May 18, 2017:

### Forced disappearance of underground Bishops Guo Xijin of Mindong and Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou – Bishop Shao still missing



Bishop Vincent Guo before 2008, while still a priest before his episcopal consecration. Photo: UCAN.

Both bishops were appointed coadjutor bishops by the Vatican and assumed the management of their respective dioceses following the death of their predecessors – underground Bishop Huang Shoucheng of Mindong, who died in July of 2016, and Bishop Zhu Weifang of Wenzhou, who was recognized also by the government and died in September of 2016. Both cases also have one other thing in common, that is, in the Diocese of Mindong as well as in the Diocese of Wenzhou, the underground Catholic community is very strong. In each case, it is thought that the authorities abducted the two bishops in the hope of convincing them to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association as well as the official Bishops' Conference. Fifty-nine year old Bishop Vincent Guo Xijin disappeared after an April 6 or 7 visit to the local government's religious affairs department in Fu'an and was released again on May 6. A Church source quoted by UCAN said that Bishop Guo was detained at a special center, which is otherwise used to convince party cadres under *shuangguai* (the party's internal

disciplinary proceedings) to confess their crimes. After Bishop Guo was released, three senior priests of his diocese were taken away by the police and detained for three days.



Bishop Peter Shao. Photo: *UCAN*.

Fifty-four year old Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin was taken away on May 18 by police and officials of the religious affairs department of Zhejiang Province, after the department had summoned him to a meeting. That was already his fourth arrest since the death of Bishop Zhu in September of 2016. According to *AsiaNews*, he was seen just by chance on June 16 by a Roman Catholic at the airport of Wenzhou, accompanied by government officials, who were taking him to an unknown destination. Both *AsiaNews* and *UCAN* reported that the authorities are allegedly demanding that Bishop Shao persuade the Vatican to name a priest of the official Church as his coadjutor. The German Ambassador in Beijing and the Holy See have each expressed their concern about the situation of Bishop Shao (see the entries of June 20, 2017, and June 26 / 27, 2017, in the section “Sino-Vatican Relations”).

In February of this year the underground Bishop Cui Tai of Xuanhua (Northern Hebei) was also taken into custody by security authorities and brought to an unknown location. As of May 24, his whereabouts were still unknown (*AsiaNews* April 10; June 6, 17, 19, 21; *UCAN* April 11; May 11; June 22, 28).

April 16, 2017:

## Easter Baptisms for 2017: 19,087 newly baptized Catholics across Mainland China



Easter of 2017: Newly baptized Catholics in the Diocese of Baotou, Inner Mongolia. Photo: *Xinde*.

According to statistics published in the Catholic weekly newspaper *Xinde*, during the Easter celebrations this year a total of 19,087 persons were baptized into the Catholic Church in the various dioceses on the Mainland. It should be noted, however, that the statistics are not complete since some dioceses had not yet handed in their final numbers but the figure given is roughly the same as for the year 2016, when 19,615 baptisms were reported. As in previous years, the largest number reported was from Hebei Province, namely 4,464 (2016: 4,063). The Diocese of Xingtai alone reported 1,395. Beijing reported 444 baptisms and Shanghai 263. As far as is known, there was one baptism in Tibet and eight in Hainan.

“We have tried our best to collect figures from both open and underground communities,” said Father Li Rongpin, chief editor of Hebei Faith Press (*UCAN* May 8; *Xinde* April 30).

April 16, 2017:

## Controversial concelebrated Mass between Bishop Ma Daqin (Shanghai) and Bishop Zhan Silu (Mindong)

Although still under house arrest, Shanghai Bishop Ma Daqin celebrated his first public Mass since 2012 together with Bishop Zhan Silu (Mindong), who is not recognized by Rome, while at the same time the bishop of Mindong Diocese recognized by Rome, Bishop Guo Xijin, had been abducted by government authorities (see above entry of April 6 and May 18, 2017).

Bishop Ma has been under some sort of house arrest since on July 7, 2012, he openly announced that he was leaving the Patriotic Association (PA) at the end of his the Mass at which he had been consecrated a bishop. In retaliation, the State-sanctioned leadership bodies of the Catholic Church in China have revoked his title of bishop. Bishop Zhan was present at Bishop Ma's consecration in 2012 (contrary to the explicit wish of Shanghai's Bishop Jin Luxian and of the diocese), although at the moment of his ordination, Ma would not allow Bishop Zhan to lay his hands on his head as is usual for concelebrants at both priestly and episcopal ordinations. According to press reports, at the surprising concelebrated Mass on Easter Sunday of 2017, Ma was actually introduced to the congregation as "Bishop Ma."

According to *UCAN*, Ma's concelebration at Mass with the illegitimate Bishop Zhan Silu "shocked" many Chinese Catholics – as had the June 2016 article Bishop Ma had published on his blog expressing his regret at having withdrawn from the Patriotic Association and his renewed acceptance in September of 2016 and January of 2017 of two positions in the Patriotic Association. Yet his concessions to the authorities have not so far seemed to have brought Bishop Ma any closer to being able to take up his position as bishop of the Diocese of Shanghai. At the priestly ordination in Shanghai on June 7, 2017, the first in the diocese since 2013, Bishop Ma was not present. The ordination to the priesthood was presided over by Bishop Shen Bin of Haimen (Jiangsu Province), who is considered to be (according to *UCAN*) "currently the most influential" man in the official Church. Scarcely a third of Shanghai's clergy showed their faces at the ordination. On May 18, 2017, seventeen religious Sisters of Shanghai Diocese professed either their temporal or perpetual vows. As *UCAN* has reported, in 2013 the authorities had put a halt to the profession of vows by religious Sisters. A person whom *UCAN* cited as one of their sources believes that the authorities only decided to allow the resumption of ordinations and profession of vows in Shanghai after Bishop Ma had made the compromises mentioned above. At this time, the Diocese of Shanghai is effectively without episcopal leadership and is in an unstable state (*AsiaNews* April 16; June 8; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* April 22; *UCAN* April 17; June 9).

April 20, 2017:

## Bishop Anicetus Wang Chongyi of Guizhou dies

Ninety-seven year old Bishop Wang Chongyi, recognized by both Rome and the Chinese Government, has died at a hospital in Guiyang. Bishop Wang was born into a Catholic family on October 26, 1919, and entered the minor seminary of Guiyang at the age of 13. He was ordained a priest in 1949 and worked as a pastor in various parishes. He was arrested during the Cultural Revolution and was sent to work in the countryside. In 1979 he was able to resume his parish work. Father Wang Chongyi was ordained Bishop of Guiyang on December 4, 1988. He resigned from the episcopate on September 8, 2014. Pope Francis accepted his resignation on March 4, 2015. His Coadjutor, Bishop Paul Xiao Zejiang, whom Bishop Wang had already ordained on September 8, 2007, assumed the leadership of the diocese. In 1999, the regime merged the Dioceses



Bishop Anicetus Wang in 2010.  
Photo: Mario Bard.

of Anlong, Guiyang and Shiqian to the Diocese of Guizhou. Bishop Wang was regarded as a very kind and generous person. In addition to Bishop Xiao, the diocese currently counts 23 priests, more than 40 Sisters and somewhere between 80,000 and 90,000 Catholics, of whom many are members of various ethnic minorities. Bishop Wang's funeral took place on April 22 in the Cathedral of Guiyang (*Fides* May 8; *UCAN* April 20).

**May 13, 2017:**

## Chinese Catholics celebrate “Our Lady of Fatima” and “Our Lady of China” on the same day

Sixteen Chinese dioceses held public celebrations in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary under the titles of “Our Lady of Fatima” and “Our Lady of China,” despite earlier problems with the government regarding the meaning of Fatima and its partly anti-Communist message. This year May 13 marked the 100th anniversary of the first apparitions of the Blessed Virgin in Fatima. The celebration of the feast of Our Lady of China, commemorating a Marian apparition in Donglü (Hebei Province) in 1900, is traditionally celebrated on the eve of Mother's Day, the second Sunday in May. This year the two feasts happened to fall on the same day. As reported in *UCAN*, the government imposed taboo about the veneration of Our Lady of Fatima appears to have faded in recent years (*UCAN* May 19).

**June 9, 2017:**

## Death of Bishop John Liu Shigong of Jining



Bishop Liu Shigong. Photo: *UCAN*.

during the Cultural Revolution, he worked as a farmer and also spent some time in a reform-through-labor camp. He was ordained bishop of Jining in 1995. He was said to have been a friendly man, who did not care much for formality.

*UCAN* writes that back in 2010 the Holy See had already appointed 52 year-old Father Anthony Yao Shun, Vicar General of the diocese, as Bishop Liu's successor, but the election required by the Chinese Government has not yet taken place. As one unnamed source told *UCAN*, Bishop Liu was hesitant, because he feared that an illegitimate bishop might concelebrate at the Episcopal ordination. Father Yao Shun was ordained a priest in 1991 and graduated from St. John's University in the United States in 1996. He is considered a liturgy expert and taught at the National Seminary in Beijing until his nomination to the office of bishop.

Bishop Liu Shigong of Jining in Inner Mongolia, recognized by both Rome and the Chinese Government, died of liver cancer at the age of 88. Bishop Meng Qinglu from Hohhot presided over the Requiem Mass, which was held in the East Church of Jining. Bishop Liu was buried in the Church cemetery at Huaershan.

He was born August 18, 1928 in Sizi Wangqi, Inner Mongolia. At the age of 14 he entered the minor seminary and later studied at the Seminary of Hohhot.

He was ordained a priest in 1956. Dur-

Jining has some 30 priests, one deacon, 12 Sisters and around 60,000 Catholics (*Fides* May 8; *UCAN* April 20).

June 17, 2017:

## New tombstone erected for Dutch missionary murdered by the Japanese in 1938



Photo: Msgr. Schraven Foundation.

On the occasion of his 110th birthday, with the participation of both ecclesiastical and civil representatives, the 3.1 meter high tombstone (representing his 31 years) for the Dutch Franciscan Father Aemilianus van Heel (1907–1938) was solemnly unveiled on June 17, 2017. The grave marker is at the site of his former missionary labors in Changzhi in Shanxi Province. Father van Heel was murdered by Japanese soldiers after he had provided refuge in his church for 2,000 Chinese, mostly women and girls, who were attempting to flee from the Japanese. He fought off a soldier intent on dragging one of the Chinese girls out of the church. The next morning Fr. van Heel was found dead, with his wrists slit and with bullet wounds in his body. The reverse of the stone bears the inscription: “Aemilianus van Heel, Franciscan missionary, born June 8, 1907 in Leiden, the Netherlands. In 1933 he came to China and from 1937 worked in the church of Shitou (Changzhi) in Yuanqu. He protected thousands of refugees, particularly women, against Japanese military forces during the Japanese aggression and in retaliation was murdered on October 8, 1938.” During the ceremony, presided over by Bishop Peter Wu Junwei of Yuncheng (Xinjiang) letters were read from former (1986–1992) Dutch Ambassador Roland van den Berg, who had received an inquiry from Shanxi about Father van Heel in 1990, as well as from the Dutch Franciscan provincial superior Father Rob Hoogenboom (*Fides* June 27; Press release of the Msgr. Schraven Foundation, the Netherlands, received on June 26).

June 20–23, 2017:

## New study course for Catholics on the “Spirit of the National Conference on Religious Work” – SARA representative on the “correct view of Sino-Vatican relations” – Bishop Ma Yinglin on the difference between “Inculturation” and “Sinicization”

According to a report published by the leadership bodies of the official Catholic Church, 150 Catholics – bishops, priests, Sisters and lay people from across China – took part in the four day course organized by the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) in Beijing. In her presentation, Dai Chenjing, head of the Second Department of SARA, which is responsible for the Christian churches, urged Catholics to adopt a “prudent and correct view of relations between China and the Vatican.” The prin-

ciple of independence, autonomy and self-government is something which the Constitution requires of all religions, Dai said. For the Catholic Church in China, this means independence and autonomy “in political, economic and religious matters,” thus Dai. She stressed that this principle “will not and cannot change.” As for Church teaching and Church regulations, the Catholic Church of China does not differ from the Catholic Church in other parts of the world, Dai said, adding that the Church in China prays daily for the Holy Father. According to the report, Dai said that before there is any improvement in Sino-Vatican relations, the autonomous election and consecration of bishops is to be continued. Bishop Ma Yinglin, the Chairman of the official Bishops’ Conference (although not recognized as such by the Holy See), explained for the first time his understanding of the difference between the two concepts of “Inculturation” (*bendihua* 本地化) and “Sinicization” (*Zhongguohua* 中国化). “Inculturation” Ma said, refers to the correlation between the local Church and local culture. “Sinicization,” on the other hand, is the demand which both the party and State make of all religions, with emphasis on political, social and cultural adjustment, Ma explained. Both are urgent tasks for the Chinese Catholic Church, the conference report quoted the Bishop as saying. – At the first training session on the “Spirit of the National Conference on Religious Work” in June of 2016, Bishop Ma had still argued that for the Catholic Church in China, inculturation [a theological concept] and Sinicization are the same concepts, something for which Catholic commentators had criticized him, according to *UCAN*. The “Sinicization” of the religions is a requirement of the National Conference on Religious Work in April of 2016, (see: *RCTC* 2016, No. 3, pp. 8-9 and *China heute* 2016, pp. 72-74, 83-86 [in German]). SARA also organized similar courses on the “Spirit of the National Conference on Religious Work” for Muslims (April 17–24, 2017) and for the Protestant circles (May 22–27, 2017). The revision of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” was also on the agenda – at least for the Protestants and the Catholics (*chinacatholic.cn* June 26; *Eglises d’Asie*, June 28; *sara.gov.cn* April 25; May 31; June 27; *UCAN* July 10).

June 21–25, 2017:

## Conference of Women Superiors organizes “First Evangelization Workshop” at the National Seminary in Beijing

Fifty-one religious Sisters belonging to 19 different congregations and involved in evangelization, 17 priests and 20 laypeople took part in the workshop, which the Conference of Women Superiors had organized together with the two official Catholic governing bodies and the National Seminary. Bishop Shen Bin, Vice-Chairman of both governing bodies, Sr. Wang Haiqin, superior of the Sisters of the Mother of God of Daming in Hebei Province and Vice-Chair of the Conference of Women Superiors, and the Vice-Rector of the National Seminary, Father Li Shuxing, opened the conference. One conference participant, Father John Baptist Zhang, said that in light of the stagnating number of baptisms in the Catholic Church of China in recent years everyone should be experiencing a “sense of crisis,” adding that the Church in China needed to make a fresh beginning. Other presenters also spoke of a crisis. Some of the key factors in this crisis were identified: declining numbers of candidates requesting Baptism; the lack of a sense of the urgency of the need for evangelization among both clergy and laity and the overall impact of urbanization; as well as homosexual relations and premarital sex among young people. There was an exchange of experiences on the topics of evangelization in the city and in the countryside; evangelization through “discipleship courses,” through media and youth ministry. Those working in these areas shared their own experiences. Among them there were also a pastor and two lay members of the Protestant church. Conference participants recognized and expressed their appreciation for the increasingly active and innovative role of the laity in the field of evangelization. “Today many lay people are way ahead of the priests and sisters in the area of evangelization,” one participant said. One lay representative suggested that a national training course for catechists be established and

that a pool of lecturers be drawn up, made up of priests, sisters and laity returning from abroad who have attained ecclesiastical degrees (adapted from the conference report found at [chinacatholic.org](http://chinacatholic.org) June 26.; there you will also find a link to a 45-minute video).

## Sino-Vatican Relations

May 21 / May 24, 2017

### Day of prayer for the Church in China – call of the Pope and pilgrimage figures from Shanghai

In his noonday remarks to the crowds assembled in St. Peter's Square for the Regina Caeli Prayer on May 21, Pope Francis said: "On 24 May, we will all join in spirit the Catholic faithful in China for the celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 'Help of Christians' venerated in the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. To the Catholics of China I say: let us lift our gaze to our Mother Mary, to help us discern God's will concerning the concrete journey of the Church in China and to support us in generously welcoming his project of love. May Mary encourage us to offer our personal contribution to the communion of believers and to the harmony of the whole of society. Let us not forget to bear witness to the faith with prayer and with love, always remaining open to encounter and to dialogue."

This year the Diocese of Shanghai published a list of the groups who had registered for the pilgrimage to the Marian shrine on Sheshan Mountain between April 29 and May 29, 2017. On this list, more than 19,300 pilgrims were counted, not only from Shanghai, but also from the Provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Guizhou, Shanxi, Hebei, from Tianjin and Beijing (*AsiaNews* May 24; [catholicsh.org](http://catholicsh.org) May 27; [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/angelus/2017/documents/papa-francesco-regina-coeli\\_20170521.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/angelus/2017/documents/papa-francesco-regina-coeli_20170521.html)). – See also the entry of June 30, 2017 in this section.

End of May / Beginning of June, 2017:

### In an article in the review *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Jesuit Father You Guo Jiang calls for a "Chinese Catholic Church with Chinese characteristics" and a redefinition of the Church's relationship with the Party

In his article entitled: "Catholicism in 21st Century China," You Guo Jiang (Jiang Youguo), a Chinese Jesuit priest currently at Boston College, writes of the methods of evangelization which the Catholic Church of China, in his opinion, should be pursuing. Under the heading: "Dialogue with the local culture," Jiang says, among other things: "Because China is so different from the rest of the world, the Chinese Catholic Church needs to learn how to deal with the local culture and political authority. In other words, while keeping its Catholic identity, the Church has to establish a 'Chinese Catholic Church with Chinese Characteristics,' if it is to enculturate Church teachings and gospel values [...]" As long as the Chinese Communist Party is the only leading party in the government, Marxism will, thus Jiang, "continue to be the ideological guideline for society. Thus, the Chinese Catholic Church will have to redefine its role and relationship with the Party and its ideological theories. This does not necessarily mean that the Church has to agree completely with Party politics and values, but it must find flexible and effective way[s] to continue its mission and ministry in China." In his call for dialogue and encounter Jiang relied on various statements of Pope Francis.

The review *La Civiltà Cattolica* is published by Italian Jesuits with the approval of the Vatican's Secretariat of State, which is why Michael Sainsbury of UCAN described the publication of the article as a “strong statement about accepting China culture – including that of the ruling Communist Party” on the part of “influential sources close to the Vatican” (English version of Jiang’s article can be found at: <https://laciviltacattolica.com/may-2017/catholicism-in-21st-century-china>; UCAN June 2, 7; *L'Espresso* – *La Repubblica* June 22).

June 20, 2017:

## German Ambassador in Beijing expresses concern for missing Bishop Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou

On the home page of the website of the German Embassy, Ambassador Michael Clauss released the following statement (in English): “I welcome China’s declared intention to achieve progress with regard to the Catholic Church. However, despite progress in this direction, we also see setbacks in guaranteeing religious freedom. One case of growing concern is the treatment of Bishop Shao Zhumin by the authorities. Since autumn last year he seems to have been forced to move to unknown locations no less than four times and now seems to have been confined to his home since his return. His full freedom of movement should be restored. I am also concerned about a number of new rules in a draft regulation on religious affairs. If unchanged, they could place further restrictions on the right to freedom of religion and belief.”

*AsiaNews* described the public stance taken by the German Ambassador as a novelty in the diplomatic world. It said that after the European Union and US President George W. Bush had earlier pleaded the fate of some imprisoned bishops and on behalf of religious freedom, diplomatic silence has prevailed on the topic for at least ten years. The declaration of the Ambassador was also reported and discussed in Chinese by international media and on the Chinese Catholic website tianzhujiao.online (Original of the declaration at: [www.china.diplo.de/Vertretung/china/de/\\_\\_\\_pr/Kopie\\_20von\\_202016/politik/190620Statement-pm.html](http://www.china.diplo.de/Vertretung/china/de/___pr/Kopie_20von_202016/politik/190620Statement-pm.html); *AsiaNews* June 21).

June 26 / 27, 2017:

## Declaration of the Press Office of the Holy See on the case of Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin – China rejects the interference on the part of “any country whatsoever”

On June 26, the Vatican News Agency *Fides* released the following statement of the Director of the Holy See Press Office, Greg Burke, regarding the case of Bishop Shao Zhumin: “The Holy See is observing with grave concern the personal situation of Mgr. Peter Shao Zhumin, Bishop of Wenzhou, forcibly removed from his episcopal see some time ago. The diocesan Catholic community and his relatives have no news or reasons for his removal, nor do they know where he is being held. In this respect, the Holy See, profoundly saddened for this and other similar episodes that unfortunately do not facilitate ways of understanding, expresses the hope that Mgr. Peter Shao Zhumin may return as soon as possible to the diocese and that he can be assured the possibility of serenely exercising his episcopal ministry. We are all invited to pray for Mgr. Shao Zhumin and for the path of the Catholic Church in China.”

According to *AFP*, on June 27, Lu Kang, spokesperson of China’s Foreign Ministry, declared: “China refuses to accept that any country whatsoever has the right to interfere in any way at all in China’s internal affairs using so-called individual cases.” He said that China, in accord with the law, protects the right of its citizens to freedom of belief, to normal religious activities and the legitimate rights of religious

groups, but at the same time, in accord with the law, reinforces its management of religious affairs just as other countries do. According to Lu, the Chinese Catholic Church, too, unfolds its religious activities according to its history and traditions and in accord with the relevant laws and regulations (*Fides* June 26; *AFP* citing *cn.rfi.fr* June 27).

June 27, 2017:

## ***Global Times* analyzes slowed-down pace of Sino-Vatican negotiations**

*Global Times*, an English-language newspaper appearing under the aegis of the party newspaper *Renmin ribao*, quoted from the article by Father You Guo Jiang SJ, which had appeared in *La Civiltà Cattolica* (see entry of End of May / Beginning of June, 2017, above), which it described as a “signal of goodwill” in the ongoing Sino-Vatican negotiations, since the article had appeared “with the approval of the Vatican’s Secretariat of State.” The journalist Francesco Sisci said to *Global Times* that “the article signals a new thinking in the Catholic doctrine. It opens up the possibility of collaboration with the Communist Party of China ...”

According to *Global Times*, there has been no progress in the negotiations in recent months. The newspaper quotes the Christianity researcher Wang Meixiu (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) as saying that “From what I heard, the two sides seem to have reached a near consensus on the appointment of future bishops. But they disagree on the treatment of existing bishops.” *Global Times* reports that China is obviously distrusting some of the underground bishops and that China’s treatment of some of the bishops such as the underground bishop of Wenzhou, often results in Catholic opposition. In addition, the newspaper also goes into Chinese demands for the Sinicization [in the article “sinification”] of religions. The newspaper quotes Wang Meixiu, according to whom Christianity has always embraced “localization” whereas the politically-sounding idea of Sinicization sets off alarm bells among some Catholics. Many Catholics fear that this could undermine their relationship with the Holy See, *Global Times* writes (*Global Times* June 27).

June 30, 2017:

## **Tenth anniversary of the publication of the letter by Pope Benedict XVI to the Church in China – “as important today as it was 10 years ago”**

The only open instruction given so far by Pope Francis to the Chinese Church was to re-read the letter of Pope Benedict XVI, said Anthony Lam Sui-ki, executive secretary of the Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Diocese of Hong Kong. Lam made the statement at a May 7 seminar held in Hong Kong on the subject of Pope Benedict’s letter. Speakers described the letter as being “as important today as it was 10 years ago.”

In writing his letter, Pope Benedict XVI intended to provide “guidelines concerning the life of the Church and the task of evangelization in China.” He also wrote on the topic of reconciliation within the Church and of the relationship between the Church and State authorities. The – since 2008 – annual May 24 World Day of Prayer for the Church in China also had its origin in that letter.

At the time of its publication in 2007, the Chinese authorities had placed a ban on the distribution of the Pope’s letter. *AsiaNews* reported that in May of 2017 many Catholics posted Pope Benedict’s prayer to “Our Lady of Sheshan” as well as the text of his letter on the platform WeChat together with the call to re-read the letter (*AsiaNews* May 24; *UCAN* May 11). – The text of Pope Benedict’s letter can be found at: [w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070527\\_](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_)

china.html; related material and commentary can be found in: *China heute* 2007, No. 4-5, pp. 150-183 (in German).

End of June 2017:

## New round in Sino-Vatican negotiations with new negotiators – Why such slow progress?

Toward the end of June a Chinese delegation was in Rome for a new round of negotiations (*Eglises d'Asie* reported on June 28 that they had left “a few days ago”) – that is, close to the slugfest between China and the Vatican over the case of Bishop Shao Zhumin (see above), which prompted a Chinese commentator quoted by *UCAN* to conclude that the latest round of negotiations “was not as smooth as expected.”

On June 15 *UCAN* had reported that after the last round of talks this past March, one of the delegation members had been replaced on each side. The new member on the Chinese side of the table is now Ms. Dai Chenjing, currently head of the Second Department of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) responsible for Christian affairs (for more about her go to the entry of June 20-23, 2017 in the section “Catholic Church”).

Writing in the *Verbiest Update*, Father Jeroom Heyndricks CICM indicates that any rumors that Rome – as requested by China – has already recognized the seven bishops consecrated without papal appointment are clearly unfounded. *UCAN* further reports that the Chinese side suspects that the Vatican, despite ongoing negotiations, continues to appoint bishops in secret. *UCAN* writes that John Cardinal Tong, in his article on “The future of Sino-Vatican dialogue from an ecclesiological point of view” published on February 9, 2017 (see text at <http://sundayex.catholic.org.hk/node/4047>), mentions “more than 30” underground bishops, while in March, in an interview with the *Catholic National Reporter*, he talks about “close to 40.” Fr. Heyndricks adds that we also need to know whether Chinese government and Vatican secretly have already prepared or appointed their own candidates for the office of Bishop for the 40 dioceses which are currently vacant. It can also be assumed that the recent attempts by the Chinese Government to extend its control over the Chinese Bishops (see the cases of bishops Guo Xijin, Shao Zhumin, Ma Daqin, etc.), have not contributed to the general building up of confidence between the two sides in their negotiations (*EDA* June 28; *UCAN* June 15; July 10; *Verbiest Update* No. 38, June 2017).

## Hong Kong

June 4, 2017:

### Hong Kong: Commemoration of the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre

Around 110,000 people participated this year in the candlelight vigil held each year in Hong Kong's Victoria Park for the victims of June 4, 1989 in Beijing. According to media reports, this year's crowd was the smallest since 2008. As also occurred last year, the ceremony was boycotted by student groups, who described the event as irrelevant. They claimed instead to advocate a policy of “Localism.” Before the memorial service, there was once again an ecumenical prayer vigil, in which approximately 900 persons took part (*UCAN* June 5).

July 1, 2017:

## 20th anniversary of the return of Hong Kong to China

On July 1, 300 Christians attended a prayer gathering, organized by the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, the Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students and four other Christian organizations. Then, they joined the estimated 60,000 participants of the annual pro-democracy rally. The number was significantly lower than in the previous year, when 110,000 people gathered. At the prayer gathering Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-sing urged those present not to lose hope despite many setbacks. He told the gathering “that many issues like the development of democracy, wealth disparity, housing affordability and labor rights had not improved despite people’s efforts over many years,” thus *UCAN*. “The ‘one country, two systems’ and talk of a ‘high degree of autonomy’ are empty words,” the bishop said. Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, was also present for both the prayer meeting and the rally that followed.

Chinese President Xi Jinping made his first visit to Hong Kong for the celebrations commemorating the return of Hong Kong to China on July 1, 1997. And on this occasion, Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, was officially installed as the new leader of Hong Kong. In his address, President Xi said that “The people of Hong Kong enjoy more extensive democratic rights and freedoms than at any other time in its history.” At the same time, however, Xi also warned against any attempt to challenge the power of the central government in Beijing. That would be “absolutely impermissible” and tantamount to crossing the red line. According to *Spiegel* online, Xi also called on Lam to strengthen the security and the “patriotic education” in the city.

Just a few streets from the site of the inauguration, pro-democratic protests broke out with a clash with supporters of Beijing. The police arrested a number of demonstrators, including Joshua Wong, one of the leaders of the “Umbrella Revolution” of 2014 (*South China Morning Post* July 1.07; *spiegel.de* July 1; *UCAN* July 5; *Xinhua* July 1).

See also the article of Anthony Lam “A Unique Situation: The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Twenty Years after the City’s Handover” in *RCTC* 2017, No. 2, pp. 22-25.

This “News Update” was first published in *China heute* 2017, No. 2, pp. 75-83 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the “News Update” refer to the year 2017.

## Invisible and Invincible: Changing Female Roles in the Chinese Protestant Church and Their Perceptions

Katrin Fiedler<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Ever since the reopening of churches, women have played a significant, if not dominant role in Chinese Protestant church life. However, in spite of being visibly active, female Christians have not been the subject of much research. Speaking from a scholarly angle, Chinese Protestant women are almost invisible as opposed to groups such as Christian entrepreneurs, intellectuals, ethnic Miao people, migrants or even factory workers and fishermen, all of which have received specific scholarly interest. This lack of material on women could suggest that gender roles within the Chinese Protestant church are so equal that gender does not lend itself as a framework to examine the role of women in the church. However, the contrast between the real-world phenomenon and its non-existence in the scholarly world is so great that there seems to be more to it. I suggest that the blind spot which women constitute on the research agenda is an outgrowth of traditional Chinese religious role models, where women were invisible in the public domain.

Interestingly, a second trend seems to be at work which feeds into the same vein of women's empowerment versus conservatism or visibility versus invisibility. While Christianity continues to be liberating or empowering for many Chinese Christian women, conservative female roles and the corresponding theology are gaining ground in parts of the Protestant landscape. This "new conservatism" threatens to make women in the Chinese church more invisible, both factually and as a research subject.

---

1 Dr. Katrin Fiedler is Sinologist and Director of the Protestant China Information Desk in Hamburg, Germany. The following text is her contribution to the international Workshop "I have called you by name' – Contribution of Chinese Women to the Church," Sankt Augustin, Germany, September 25–26, 2014. A German translation of this text was first published in *China heute* 2016, No. 2, pp. 98-109. A conference report was published in *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* V (2015) 1, pp. 30-38. A publication of the workshop papers in English language by the Steyl Institute of Missiology and the Institute Monumenta Serica in cooperation with the China-Zentrum, all Sankt Augustin, Germany is in preparation. The Monumenta Serica Sinological Research Center, Taipei, Taiwan will publish a volume of the workshop papers in Chinese language. [Editors' note.]

The author would like to thank the following persons for information, comments, suggestions and help in retrieving literature: Theresa Cariño, Johanna Lüdde, Alek Stypa, a Chinese reviewer who wished to remain anonymous and three female Protestant interviewees in Guangxi.

Based on a review of the existing literature, I describe the situation of women in the contemporary Protestant church, explore the various gender roles espoused within parts of the Protestant landscape, and make suggestions for potential areas of research. Instead of offering a single coherent understanding of the role of women based on one underlying theory, I see the task at hand as more exploratory; this paper is therefore rather cursory and preliminary in nature. Due to the sociological bent of my approach, any further research would likely include methods such as participant observation and interviews. Since the available literature resources cover both registered and unregistered Protestant churches, this article will refer to both groups and differentiate where necessary.

## Fraught with Ambiguities: The Female Face of Chinese Protestantism

While the earliest churches that were reopened in the late 1970s were located in cities, the massive growth of Protestant Christianity throughout the 1980s and 1990s happened in the countryside. Here, the Christian faith had survived clandestinely during the Cultural Revolution among small groups of believers, many of them women.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the early face of the newly emerging Chinese Protestant church was an overwhelmingly female one. Chinese observers of the 1980s and 1990s who coined the word “Christianity fever” also liked to speak of the “*san duo*,” the “three manys.” Congregations consisted almost exclusively of elderly women believers, often in a bad state of health; hence, there were “many elderly, many women, and many illiterate persons.”

From the outset, women took on leadership roles as preachers, choir masters, leaders of Bible study groups and prayer meetings. In a sense, their sheer numerical dominance paired with the need for leaders and volunteer workers created social openings for women to become active in their congregations. For many rural women, their involvement in church had empowering effects, be it through improved literacy thanks to Bible classes or by enabling them to take on roles often not otherwise available to women in a conservative rural setting. Findings from the Catholic context support this view of Christianity as conducive to female empowerment in rural areas. Kong Kit-Fan describes the role of Catholicism for some rural Cantonese women in the late 1990s as status enhancing. Not only did some of the older women acquire literacy skills thanks to Bible classes, but in Kong’s exploratory study Catholic women were also more assertive in choosing their own spouses than their non-Catholic counterparts. While, also due to Catholic doctrine, the roles women could take on in church were limited, Kong describes her interviewees as active participants in ritual life as opposed to the marginal status of non-Catholic women in traditional Chinese ancestral rites.<sup>3</sup> However, in Kong’s study both Catholics and non-Catholics retained the strong cultural preference for boys. Kong sees the greater autonomy

---

2 Cao 2013, p. 153.

3 Kong 2003, p. 93.

of these women not as a result of Catholic dogma, but of practices of the faith community and its rituals.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of the re-emerging and growing Protestant church, the preponderance of lay leaders with little theological education had and has its pitfalls, though; until today, pseudo-Christian sects remain a threat both to Christian congregations and the general public. At the same time, the rural demographics of the church had implications for the perception and function of women within their congregations. The fact that most elderly rural women were illiterate or semi-literate contributed to an image of the church as a place for people with little education.

Besides acting as lay leaders, women pastors and elders have been working as ordained church leaders in the official church since the 1980s,<sup>5</sup> and, at least officially, the ordination of women is not questioned. However, according to recent figures given by Xie Bingguo, head of the Shanghai Christian Council, only about one-tenth of all 3,800 official pastors are women,<sup>6</sup> while (according to my personal estimates) female students make up about half of all theological students. This discrepancy points to a continuing problem of acceptance of women pastors at the grassroots. Theoretically, a system of endorsement by the sending congregations aims at ensuring that students of theology, females and males alike, are later taken back by their home congregations where they will be ordained after a suitable period of probation. In reality, many women theologians report having to wait for much longer than the recommended minimum of two years for ordination or are not ordained at all. Often, established lay leaders in the congregations oppose the ordination for fear of seeing their own influence dwindle. Similarly, while the China Christian Council had a woman president in the early 2000s, lower echelons of the church hierarchy are still dominated by male leaders. Within the official church structure, the China Christian Council's Commission on Women's Work and the YWCA offer channels for women to be involved but also nurtured in church-related work. While the YMCA/YWCA has a long history in China, the Commission on Women's Work was only established in 1993.<sup>7</sup>

With a Protestant revival propelled largely by women, images of female spirituality and the ideal woman believer started to emerge. Specifically, the term "Martha" or "Sister Martha" (modelled on the biblical figure of Martha as in Luke 10, 38-42) has become a synonym for the devout woman believer.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the late 1990s, the official church magazine *Tianfeng* used the hypothetical model believer Martha to enlighten and instruct semi-literate readers by means of a cartoon which prominently featured "Sister Martha."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Cao Nanlai reports for Wenzhou that women volunteers in church are called "Marthas" for the household duties they fulfil in church.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, contradictory values

4 Kong 2003, p. 97.

5 Cao 2001, p. 66.

6 Xie Bingguo, personal information at the international workshop "Religion and Tradition – Critique and Critical Perspectives in China and Europe," August 20–22, 2014 in Hamburg, Germany.

7 Cao 2001, pp 65ff.

8 Hence, Jin Yanyan speaks of the "Martha phenomenon" in her article about the conversion of rural women to Christianity: Jin 2005.

9 Dunn 2008, pp. 15f.

10 Cao 2011, pp. 99f.

are attached to the role model of Martha. On the one hand, “Marthas” are praised for their housewifely qualities and are presented as spiritual role models of devotion, based on the biblical Martha who occupies herself with serving Jesus rather than sitting down to listen like her sister Mary. On the other hand, through taking on housewifely duties women easily acquire a second-class status, both practical and spiritual, in church life. Cao Nanlai reports for Wenzhou that the “homemaking” church duties on Sundays often keep women from fully participating in the services.

All over China, women Christians are also strongly linked with forms of religious life that resemble traditional folk religious practices, including healing prayer and prayer on behalf of others. While especially rural Protestantism derives much of its vitality from these practices, the fact that they are often performed by women reinforces the image of women as uncultured, traditional and perhaps even prone to syncretistic interpretations of Christianity.

Given the above observations, the female face of Chinese Protestantism is fraught with ambiguities. Seen from the angle of church development, women exhibit both strengths and weaknesses. While women are the motor behind the Christian revival, often do the brunt of congregational work and are praised for their devotion and spiritual gifts, they are also associated with religious practices that seem dubious from an orthodox Christian viewpoint. Church life strengthens women and empowers them up to a certain point, yet also limits their roles when they are expected to be “Marthas” rather than “Deborahs,” housewifely assistants rather than ordained pastors.

Finally, it has to be noted that the “three manys” that once characterized the church no longer hold true for urban congregations, which now feature men and women in much more balanced proportions, as well as believers of all age groups and educational backgrounds. A large increase in urban congregations over the past decade, many of them unregistered, has raised the general educational level within congregations as well as their financial standing. In the cities, it is now young academics and the educated middle class who convert to Christianity. Besides creating congregations that are in themselves more socially diverse, this change has brought about congregations with distinct social and theological profiles. It remains to be seen whether this diversification has also brought about a diversification in female gender roles and if so, what these gender roles are.

## Literature Overview

In how far does the existing literature accurately reflect the role, theology and perception of women in the Chinese Protestant church? Given the dominant role of women in the early phases of the Protestant “Christianity fever,” the most surprising fact is that women hardly feature at all in the available literature on contemporary Protestantism. Instead, some of the more substantial scholarship about Chinese Protestant women refers to their historical role. Examples would include Jessie G. Lutz’s work, who has described the historical importance of women for the early stages of the Protestant church in China,<sup>11</sup> and

---

11 Lutz 2010.

Kwok Pui-Lan, who also offers insights into the historical role of women in the church.<sup>12</sup> Chinese conference proceedings have added to this area of research.<sup>13</sup> Finally, a number of papers and books introduce specific women and their contribution to the Chinese Protestant church.

Among the few specialized pieces that are concerned with women in the contemporary Protestant church, quality varies and some pieces are obviously written not only with a scholarly agenda in mind.<sup>14</sup> Also, ethnic minority women seem to find overproportional interest.<sup>15</sup> A more solid, albeit brief example is Monika Gänßbauer's assessment of the situation of women in the Chinese Protestant church at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> One early Chinese text on the "feminisation" of Christianity<sup>17</sup> is mentioned in Hunter and Chan's classic *Protestantism in Contemporary China*; unfortunately, I was unable to retrieve this article.

Indeed, some of the most interesting recent findings about women in the Chinese Protestant Church have come about as by-products of research directed at other questions. In particular, Fredrik Fällman's insights into Chinese New Calvinism and Cao Nanlai's findings about Wenzhou Boss Christians have revealed interesting trends to which we will turn later. Specifically, their findings suggest that besides the empowering effects of Protestantism there is a second, opposite trend at work which relegates women into more traditional roles.

To examine contemporary Chinese Protestant theology for its feminist implications would be a task of its own. Suffice it to say that, among the various theological developments of the past years both in the church and the academe, feminist theology does not play a prominent role. Few Chinese theologians explicitly voice feminist theological concerns; examples from the official church include Peng Yaqian, Wu Jinzhen, Wang Peng, Chen Kuanrong, Chen Meilin and Cao Shengjie.<sup>18</sup> In spite of these individual voices, the Chinese church is still far from developing a theological vision that is both genuinely Chinese and feminist.

Besides formulating tentative reflections about feminist theology, female church representatives also voice concern over the continuing influence of traditional notions and behaviour in grassroots churches, for example the preference of boys over girls, the traditional practice of arranged marriages, and the low self-esteem of women.<sup>19</sup>

Does the dearth of material about women believers mean that the Chinese Protestant church is a church where gender does play a role which remains as yet unexplored? Or is it ungendered, meaning highly equal in the roles women and men perform? Anecdotal evidence suggests the opposite. Women report difficulties in being accepted as congre-

12 Kwok 1996.

13 See, for example, Tao – Huang 2005.

14 See, for example, Ng 2007 or Wommack 2006.

15 For a recent example, see Wang 2014.

16 Gänßbauer 2001.

17 Xu 1990.

18 For a selection of their writings, see for example, volumes 15 and 17 of the *Chinese Theological Review*.

19 Wu 2001, pp. 78 and 84.

gational leaders or in being ordained, while husbands of women pastors feel that their role as ordinary believers in a congregation led by their wife constitutes a loss of face. On the other hand, male seekers who feel attracted by congregational life are put off by the numerical dominance of women believers, and men who consider becoming full-time evangelists face the problem that they are still expected to be the main breadwinners. As Cao Shengjie admits in her introductory piece about the role of feminist theology in the Chinese church,

*Many people's thinking at the time [in the late 1980s/early 1990s] was that since men and women both participated in the work of the church, there was no need for a special category of women's work.<sup>20</sup>*

More than twenty years later, both are still needed: gender-specific work within the church and also the theological, pastoral and scholarly reflection about it – not least because over the past years, gendered church spaces have become more prominent in parts of the church.

## Gendered Church Spaces in China: Wenzhou Boss Christians

A typically Chinese brand of Christianity which has received much scholarly attention of late for its combination of Christian ethics and business are the “Wenzhou Boss Christians.” The Wenzhou church model (with its mostly unregistered, but visible churches) is of interest here because it provides an example of a highly gendered church<sup>21</sup> which can, especially by contrasting it with the New Calvinist approach which we will discuss later, serve to deepen our understanding of gendered identities and theological visions in the Chinese Protestant church.

In his highly inspiring account of Wenzhou church life, Cao Nanlai characterizes the practical, spiritual and theological gender roles of women and men as follows: Although women outnumber men in church, it is the men who take on formal leadership roles and feel entitled to make moral judgements.<sup>22</sup> Women carry out “homemaking” duties in church such as cleaning, cooking, and the overall creation of a homely atmosphere.<sup>23</sup> While men are judged by their professional success, Wenzhou church women tend to be viewed more by their family lives and connections. Men are seen as rational, where women are linked with (or, by some, suspected of) emotionality.<sup>24</sup> Correspondingly, men favour textually centred church activities such as theological study sessions and publishing work,<sup>25</sup> while female church life in Wenzhou revolves around experientially based activities such as spiritual cultivation meetings and prayer sessions. Women experience spontaneous and uncontrolled forms of spiritual expression such as speaking in tongues,

<sup>20</sup> Cao 2001, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> Of which separate seating in church is perhaps the most obvious sign: Cao 2011, p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> Cao 2011, pp. 99 and 110.

<sup>23</sup> Cao 2011, p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> Cao 2011, p. 99.

<sup>25</sup> Cao 2011, p. 101.

weeping and crying, while male religious life emphasizes control of self and others. In a problematic reading of the experiential, charismatic religiosity they exhibit, women are also associated with folk religion and superstition.<sup>26</sup> Elite males create exclusive social occasions such as invitation-only banquets that serve as social markers.

Hence, male religiosity expresses itself in forms of hierarchy, rationality, control and exclusivism, while female Protestant religiosity in Wenzhou creates bodily experiences, vulnerability, intimacy and inclusion. In an interesting opposition of roles, even food comes to be associated with the different gender constructions, with elite banquets for church males on the one hand and female fasting on the other hand.

In the secluded and almost exclusively gendered religious spaces which they inhabit, Wenzhou women believers are empowered; they connect with God and their fellow sisters (and a few brothers) in strong ways, and spiritually gifted women such as “prayer women” hold positions of spiritual authority. Ultimately, however, it has to be noted that it is only in these gendered spaces that Wenzhou sisters experience this form of liberation.<sup>27</sup>

It is in the charismatically inclined parts of the Wenzhou church that the female proclivity for experiential spirituality is explicitly valued and sometimes even sought after by males, for example with specific prayer requests. However, at least from the majority male perspective there is a hierarchical value attached to this ranking of activities which sees the male brand of church life as superior. In fact, strong notions of class accompany the male vision of church life, with men denigrating the traditional female backbone of the church as “low *suzhi*” believers (i.e. believers of lower educational background) who are simultaneously denied access to elite male church activities. Cao therefore characterizes the “repositioning of Christian faith and refashioning of elite male Christians” in Wenzhou as “often deliberately at the expense of the poor, elderly, female believers.”<sup>28</sup>

As Cao Nanlai points out, the gender role ascribed to women in the Wenzhou case has many parallels in the patriarchal Confucian tradition which places a similar emphasis on “submission, subordination, purity, piety and domesticity.”<sup>29</sup> Wenzhouese Christian men and women perpetuate the traditional emphasis on bearing sons, with the additional twist that Christian interpretations are superimposed on the childbearing process. Traditional ideas of “efficacy” of god(s) and the preference for males thus mix with Christian themes of grace, temptation (for abortion) and faith. The ultimate replication of traditional gendered behaviour appears in the form of elite male banquets for which young, beautiful women are required, albeit only in lowly assistant functions:

*The ability to command the bodies of tall, pretty, sweet-sounding women, whether in the church or at work, is another status symbol for these men.*<sup>30</sup>

26 Cao 2011, p. 110.

27 Cao 2011, pp. 112 and 115. Cao interestingly quotes women as using the term *shifang* – “to release,” “to set free” – in this context.

28 Cao 2011, p. 106.

29 Cao 2011, p. 100.

30 Cao 2011, p. 108.

## Gendered Church Spaces in China: New Calvinism

Another interesting trend within Chinese Christianity of recent years has been the emergence of what Fredrik Fällman labels “New Calvinism”.<sup>31</sup> As a Christian subculture that emerged among elite intellectuals, Fällman understands it both as a development of and a counter-movement to the Culture Christians of the 1980s and 1990s. Like the former Culture Christians, this new generation of Chinese Christian intellectuals is ultimately driven by the search for a vision for their country and society; however, in its sources and content it differs markedly from the early Christian academics. While the Culture Christians derived much of their inspiration from theologians like Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann and Emil Brunner, the New Calvinists draw on reformed theology, in particular the original writings of early reformers. The resulting ecclesiological, social and political vision encompasses strict moral codes for personal and public behaviour, including a strict church discipline, rigorous sexual mores and clearly delineated roles for men and women.

It is this latter point which makes the emergence of New Calvinism remarkable in the context of Chinese women believers. China’s New Calvinism is particularly attractive for lawyers and similar elite intellectuals who are used to rational thinking and for whom the rational exploration of theology constitutes one part of the attraction of Calvinism.<sup>32</sup> As Fällman puts it,

*It is surprising that young well-educated women in contemporary China, brought up in a secular and comparatively equal context, can voluntarily choose to join a religious congregation where they are not equal to men.*<sup>33</sup>

One of the most prominent examples of this trend is Shouwang Church in Beijing. This non-registered congregation received international attention in 2011 due to its prolonged struggle with the Beijing authorities over the use of a property the congregation had acquired but was ultimately denied access to. According to the Shouwang rules, even women who were ordained elsewhere before joining the congregation only assume the title and role of “teacher” (*jiaoshi*) within the Shouwang congregation. They are expected to be submissive to male authority in church.<sup>34</sup> Fällman explains the assigning of differing roles to men and women with the importance of complementarianism in some strands of Calvinism, namely the idea that men and women fill different roles that complement each other.

The rising popularity of Calvinism raises a number of questions that go beyond the mere male-female divide. The Calvinist idea of complementarianism has its correspondence, of course, in Confucian gender roles and can even be read as a wider representation of dualist *yin-yang* thinking. As such, the Chinese New Calvinist “counter-movement” is one further building block in the ongoing re-traditionalization of Chinese society. Among China’s intellectuals with their varying visions for China – the New Left, the Liberals, the

31 Fällman 2013, p. 155.

32 Fällman 2013, p. 160.

33 Fällman 2013, p. 163.

34 Fällman 2013, pp. 163f.

Neo-Confucians –, the New Calvinists certainly endorse a conservative worldview and are probably closest to the Neo-Confucians.

What remains is a “paradoxical representation of individualism and modernity”<sup>35</sup> which needs further exploration. It is probably safe to assume that the deliberate conservatism exhibited in New Calvinism is a reaction to the sexual and moral permissiveness that pervades parts of Chinese society. A widespread practice of kept mistresses (*ernai*), often linked with corruption, and the overall commercialization of women’s bodies are part of this new permissiveness. Many of the social phenomena against which New Calvinism is directed have a crippling effect on female gender roles, be it the increase in “second wives,” the rise in student prostitution for luxuries or the trend towards cosmetic surgery as a means of career-building. Why do elite women, then, chose a form of Protestantism that also imposes restrictions on women? Two important differences exist between the retrenchment of female roles in wider Chinese society and in New Calvinist congregations. One is the degree to which women’s roles are curtailed. The lasting commercialization of women and their bodies as exhibited in wider Chinese society is certainly of more damaging impact than separated seating in church or submitting to male leadership “only” in church. The second important difference lies in the voluntariness of the submission paired with a situation of choice. Even if student prostitution, relationships with “sugar daddies” and cosmetic surgery are similarly voluntary decisions, these decisions spring from less privileged positions than the women that join Calvinist congregations presumably do hold. Incidentally, the retrenchment of female roles that is currently happening in parts of Chinese society may be a phenomenon that is newly emerging after the Maoist era with its planned economy, yet it is not modern in the ordinary understanding of the word. Perhaps the explanation lies in the emergence of a different kind of modernity in China.

## Tradition, Religion and Chinese Women: Invisibility and Invincibility

In how far does the emergence of gendered church spaces confirm or reject Chinese religious tradition? In the past, the pillars of Chinese ritual life were embedded in the patriarchal tradition of society. Confucian public rituals by office holders as well as the more important forms of ancestor worship were carried out exclusively by men. With its preference of men over women as well as clearly delineated gender roles of men as “public” and women as “private” persons, the dominant Confucian ideology prevented women from taking on ritual leadership roles. Ancestor worship, as an outgrowth of indigenous traditions overlaid with Confucian ideas and folk religious practices, was also dependent on men for all important rites such as ancestor veneration on Qingming, and as a result contributed to the overpowering emphasis on male offspring in Chinese family life. Community festivals also relied on men, the visible und public figures, for all important functions.

35 Fällman 2013, p. 164.

However, besides the Great Tradition of Confucianism as well as the rites relating to patrilineal ancestor worship, a parallel strand of religiosity was and is at work, the so-called Little Tradition of popular religion, which was accessible to women and is, in fact, largely maintained by them. Ways of “doing religion” (to use Adam Chau’s expression) that are practiced by women include daily ritual offerings to ancestors in the home, offerings to the Hungry Ghosts, divination, exorcisms and participation in individual or joint temple worship. In everyday life, therefore, women were and are active as “religious specialists.”<sup>36</sup>

There also existed and exist specifically feminine forms of religiosity, with female mediums, shamans and the like, and also in the form of religious communities for women. Historically, one of the most interesting examples, often highlighted for its liberating, empowering role, were the marriage-resisting Buddhist sisterhoods of Guangdong, the *zi-shunü*.<sup>37</sup>

Chinese tradition therefore offers both areas of “invisibility” and “invincibility” for women. Women, though they produced and brought up the male offspring so desperately needed for much of ritual and religious life, remained invisible in the public religious domain. In the private domain as well as in specialized areas, women were visible and important, though, holding spiritual positions of authority or even using religion as a means of self-liberation from traditional gender roles.

In many ways, Chinese Protestant Christianity mirrors traditional Chinese patriarchy and traditional religious role models. When, as Cao describes, spiritually gifted women believers perform religious services at the request of men, they take on a role traditionally filled by women in the family.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the separation of “inside”/private and “outside”/public of Protestant church life as described for Wenzhou mirrors the traditional religious division of labour between women and men. The marginalization of women in leadership roles and their specialization as “prayer mothers” or healers follows traditional patterns of the male Great Tradition and the female Little Tradition, as does the emergence of exclusive female spheres in prayer meetings which Cao Nanlai describes for Wenzhou.

I suggest that the little scholarly attention Chinese Christian women find is a product of the traditional religious perception of women. The connection with popular religious culture carries with it overtones of feudalism, superstition and a general lack of education as opposed to the Great Tradition of Confucianism, which is connoted with philosophy and education. Especially in the early phases of the “Christianity fever,” this perception applied to Christian women with their “three manys.” Secondly, the emergence of gendered church spaces such as Wenzhou Boss Christianity or New Calvinism constitutes a modern interpretation of Chinese tradition with its differentiated roles for men and women.

## Preliminary Interpretations

The examples examined here at some length, New Calvinism and Wenzhou Boss Christianity, reveal a number of parallels, but also exhibit important differences. Both churches

36 Hunter – Chan 1993, p. 174.

37 For a summarizing account of this practice, see Watson 1994.

38 See Cao 2011, p. 100; and Hunter – Chan 1993, p. 174.

present themselves as modern, progressive and rational, and there is some emphasis on “culture” and “self-cultivation.” However, for the Wenzhou Boss Christians this impetus derives from the fact that as newly rich, these elite men have to assert their high cultural status, while the New Calvinists mostly stem from an academic elite. Both the New Calvinists and the Wenzhou Boss Christians do not practice female ordination and maintain highly gendered religious practices in their church life. Yet when it comes to personal morality, there seems to be more allowance for the business practices of the contemporary Chinese mainstream in the Wenzhou case, in particular with regards to sexuality, than in the case of the New Calvinists. Wenzhou men speak of a “flexible study and application of the Bible,”<sup>39</sup> and double sexual standards apply for men and women.<sup>40</sup>

One interesting aspect in Wenzhou Boss Christianity is the way in which men and women submit to the will of God. Women feel God’s presence and God’s will transmitted through bodily sensations, while men see the successful implementation of their personal and business plans as signs of God’s will and divine blessing for their ventures.<sup>41</sup> While men interpret “God’s will” flexibly, women put more emphasis on following God’s will and finding it out in the first place, although there are also women who state that “the method of God’s work has changed,”<sup>42</sup> meaning that the emotional signs of God’s work as typically experienced in charismatic forms of religiosity have diminished in favour of rationality.

These two different approaches to understanding God’s will ultimately point to different images of God, and one wonders whether a perceived rise in rationality in the way that God works also means that God becomes, in the eyes of these believers, more “male,” “rational” or “exclusive.” And like the Wenzhou Boss Christians, the New Calvinists stress submission under God’s will. Along similar lines, the voluntary submission of female Calvinist believers under the authority of their male counterparts and God raises questions about their image of God. Is their God, by implication, male?

In an authoritarian political system like the Chinese, it is hard to overlook the fact that questions of submission and authority play an important role both for the New Calvinists and the Boss Christians. Although intellectuals such as the New Calvinists do concern themselves with questions of governance and ideal political systems, it seems that they are victims of an authoritarian system that ill-prepares them for the challenges of a truly liberal democracy. Similarly, the Boss Christians adhere to traditional forms of authoritarianism both in the family and in church. It seems that China’s political authoritarianism leaves both groups bruised and runs, in consequence, like a subcurrent through their theological thinking. Observations from other churches around the globe confirm these findings and place Chinese churches within the broader canvas of charismatic churches. Writing from the perspective of global Pentecostalism, Bernice Martin remarks that gendered hierarchies bloom in authoritarian surroundings.<sup>43</sup>

39 Cao 2011, p. 125.

40 Cao 2011, pp. 117 and 115.

41 Cao 2011, p. 11.

42 Cao 2011, p. 117.

43 Martin 2013, p. 118.

Linked to the question of authoritarianism is the question of subjugation. While all Chinese Protestants with their evangelical heritage strongly propound believers' subjugation under God's will, the New Calvinists and the Boss Christians place additional emphasis on the subjugation of women under men, and women comply voluntarily with these precepts. Obviously, the voluntary aspect is of extraordinary importance if we feel compelled to judge the role of women and men in these churches from a gender-sensitive perspective. Still, the puzzle remains as to why women choose these restrained gender roles for themselves, particularly in the case of the "high-powered" New Calvinist congregations. In the case of Wenzhou, it seems likely that women either never left their traditional roles entirely or returned to them early on in the economic development process. Cao emphasizes the domestic orientation of women's work in Wenzhou which includes assisting men in their businesses from the home.<sup>44</sup> Again, the theme of invisibility crops up – it is noteworthy that the "Martha's" work that women do in Wenzhou, as church sisters, homemakers and breadwinners, is "invisible" from a wider societal perspective.<sup>45</sup>

As others have argued convincingly<sup>46</sup> Chinese Protestantism is to a large extent Pentecostal in substance and appearance, even if Chinese Christians do not use the label "Pentecostal" themselves. It would probably be preferable to use the word proto-Pentecostalism to describe the Spirit-centred, charismatic type of Christianity that dominates many rural congregations and can still be found in numerous city churches. It is therefore instructive to revert to findings from global Pentecostalism to illuminate the gender-specific issues raised in this paper. In how far do our Chinese findings mirror phenomena found in global Pentecostalism?

Studies on Pentecostalism in Latin America and Mozambique suggest that the family values and sexual morality espoused by Pentecostal churches are more attractive to women than to men, since women welcome the corresponding curtailing of male privileges while men find them too hard to give up.<sup>47</sup> This is one explanation for the dominance of women among Latin American converts.

It seems that what matters is the point of departure in terms of female liberation before conversion. While both men and women have to submit to rather rigorous moral standards, in many parts of the world women who join Pentecostal churches start out from a marginalized position, which means that in the end they gain more than they lose, which is why Hefner speaks of the "Pentecostal bargain" and describes Pentecostalism as "gender gentle."<sup>48</sup> While some of these dynamics may also apply to Chinese women, especially rural ones, the question is likely more complex for urbanites. Do they also feel that in overall terms of male-female relationships, they gain more than they lose by submitting voluntarily to men in church and family life while asserting family and marriage-centred values? In the current permissive social climate of Chinese urban society, this may well be the case.

---

44 Cao 2011, p. 119.

45 Cao 2011, p. 119.

46 See Cao 2013 and Oblau 2005.

47 Hefner 2013, pp. 10f.

48 Hefner 2013, p. 28.

Another parallelism between Pentecostal churches elsewhere and many Chinese congregations is the fact that women take on important roles in church life, yet are often excluded from formal leadership roles.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, the gendered division into charismatic, “female” spiritual authority and scriptural, “male” spiritual authority found in Wenzhou is a phenomenon typical also of other Pentecostal churches and can be a source of competition and tension in similar settings elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> Finally, the simultaneous assertion and control of the body is a typical Pentecostal phenomenon.<sup>51</sup>

## Towards a Research Agenda

A look at the existing literature about women in the Chinese Protestant church indicates that the topic has, so far, been researched from the historical, geographical and ethnic margins of Chinese society, with historical figures and ethnic minority women at the centre of attention. What is needed now is a look at the role of women, their self-perception as well as the roles ascribed to them, from within the heart of Chinese Christianity. In the light of our observations above, possible research questions include:

- What types of gender roles can we detect? Can we attempt a classification of different gender roles? Are there conscious efforts to counterbalance the existing role model of “Martha” by a role model of “Deborah,” as an article by Chen Meilin seems to imply?<sup>52</sup>
- In Cao’s Wenzhou study, perhaps due to the researcher’s own gender, we learn more about male perceptions of women than female perceptions of men, and the male attitudes that Cao describes reveal what Wu Jinzhen states for other contexts: “Female worth was measured by male standards.”<sup>53</sup> To bring out the female perspective on women’s own as well as male gender roles is one of the foremost tasks at hand.
- Cao describes for Wenzhou that leading elite males seem to fear some of the qualities attributed to female religiosity, such as emotionality. Do women in turn fear the male brand of (Wenzhou) religiosity? In how far are different forms of male and female religiosity markers of gender identity?
- What image of God do female and male believers hold?
- What is the relationship between faith, authoritarianism and voluntary submission in the contemporary Chinese context?
- Given the question of voluntary submission as well as the general attractiveness of the traditionalist church models presented here, it would be interesting to know more about the socioeconomic and educational background of the women among Wenzhou’s Boss Christians and the New Calvinists. Are the women who submit voluntarily to the authority of men their educational and socioeconomic peers?

49 Hefner 2013, p. 12.

50 Martin 2013, p. 118.

51 Martin 2013, p. 118.

52 See Chen 2003, quoted in ANS 2003, p. 9.

53 Wu 2001, p. 77.

- One area of interest are the body images endorsed by different churches and their corresponding dress codes. Some congregations criticize women who dress up as “not spiritual”<sup>54</sup> and do not allow women choir members to appear with make-up; other congregations see well-groomed, carefully made-up women as giving glory to God and to the beauty God created. As we have seen, the trend towards female submission as endorsed by the Wenzhou Boss Christians can also encompass a physical component, when good-looking girls are used to “adorn” prestigious male-dominated events. Where is the boundary between using women and liberating them for their full female potential?
- The relationship between tradition and modernity in the contemporary Chinese Christian context. Wenzhou Christians describe their gender roles as “traditional,”<sup>55</sup> but apart from indicating their own traditionalism (for example with regards to seating), it remains unclear what type of “tradition” Wenzhou Christians refer to when they invoke it: the Christian tradition as imported by the missionaries? Or rather their own Chinese-Confucian tradition interpreted in a new Christian way? Would it perhaps even be possible to speak of an invented tradition?

## Conclusion and Outlook

Besides women’s work as it is done through the Women’s Commission of the CCC, gender is not much of a pastoral or theological concern in the higher echelons of the official church. However, local congregations occasionally offer designated activities for women; in a number of urban centres, the YWCA offers activities for girls and women. While grassroots churches struggle with changing male and female roles in a context of social change and gender issues certainly play a role in everyday pastoral care, the topic has yet to be taken up in a more systematic way by the official church. Moreover, in the Chinese discourse, “gender” still means a single differentiation between (biological and social) male and female gender, while other sexual identities (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender) are entirely excluded from the official discourse. Reflections aimed at gender justice are also implicitly equated with “feminist.” Like many churches elsewhere, Chinese Protestant churches still fall far from formulating theological and pastoral positions that offer people of all sexual identities dignity, support and true gender justice.

Also, gender stereotypes prevail even in texts that are explicitly aimed at providing a feminist perspective, as Monika Gänßbauer shows.<sup>56</sup> One example is Archie Lee, who sees women as embodying “compassion, goodness and the basic concern for life.”<sup>57</sup>

It is interesting to note that perhaps the most successful Christian-inspired heretical cult of the past two decades in China is Eastern Lightning (also known as the Church of the Almighty God), which proclaims that Jesus returned as a Chinese woman. One wonders whether the female face of Christ propagated through the cult has anything to do

54 Wu 2001, p. 83.

55 Cao 2011, p. 97.

56 Gänßbauer 2001, p. 70.

57 Lee 1996, p. 259.

with the remarkable resilience of the group. In this sense, the success of Eastern Lightning can also be read as an appeal to existing churches for a theology and a church that are, if not feminist, more consciously feminine.

Instead, the images that women believers, the “Marthas” of the church, evoke, are often ambiguous. Women are linked with what we could term “feminine ways of doing religion” that include specific religious practices (some of them viewed as dangerously close to folk religion and syncretism) as well as “housewifely” duties in congregational life. In a recent article, Joy Tong and Yang Fenggang have added another reading to the dynamics of female gender and Protestant faith in the Chinese context. Describing a Chinese congregation in the US, they write about the “femininity” of Chinese Christianity. According to them, this refers to qualities of faith and faith expression usually perceived to be typically feminine, such as “passionate behaviour, emotional expressiveness, and authenticity.”<sup>58</sup> With this assessment, they echo other scholars’ descriptions of charismatic Christianity as feminine. However, Tong and Yang link this “femininity” expressively to Daoism. According to them, one reason for the attractiveness of charismatic Protestantism is its resemblance to traditional Daoist practices.<sup>59</sup>

Despite its ongoing success in individual congregations such as the US-based one described by Tong and Yang, in mainland China there seems to be a trend for this “female brand of Christianity” or the feminine way of “doing religion,” with its body-centred, charismatic approach to spirituality, to be diminishing, both within congregations and within the proto-denominational landscape. As Cao Nanlai shows for the Wenzhou case, there is a process of theological rationalization in which the rural charismatic female movement is actively criticized<sup>60</sup> and which attaches less value to the charismatic approach to spirituality, up to the point where one woman believer asserts that “God’s way of working has changed” [to a less spirit-oriented, more rational way of communicating with humans]. Cao therefore sees the female charismatic form of Christianity as endangered.<sup>61</sup> Again, we find an interesting analogy in global Pentecostalism. It is a well-known phenomenon that during the process of attaining more mature forms of establishment, Pentecostal churches tend to become “less charismatic, more hierarchical, and more masculine.”<sup>62</sup>

On a larger scale, the emergence of more rational quasi-denominations in China such as New Calvinism alongside the existing charismatic, proto-Pentecostal type of Christianity matches the trend towards more rationality that we also find within churches as described for the Wenzhou case. Both within the larger Protestant landscape and in individual churches, a trend towards “masculinization” seems to be going on. It is also conclusive with trends in global Pentecostalism, where second- and third-generation former Pentecostals tend to lean towards other forms of Evangelicalism with the acquisition of

58 Tong – Yang 2014, p. 195.

59 Tong – Yang 2014, pp. 208f.

60 Cao 2013, p. 165.

61 Cao 2011, pp. 155 and 157.

62 Hefner 2013, p. 8.

formal education and relative wealth, which is why some observers already see Pentecostalism waning in Latin America.<sup>63</sup>

The potential decline of the “feminine,” charismatic approach to spirituality is curiously echoed in the fact that in the official Chinese church, the short bloom of feminist theology was over before it ever really started. Already in 2001, Gänßbauer noted a decreasing interest in feminist theology and women’s issues as opposed to a few years earlier. “In view of the latest developments it may be presumed that the debate about – at least Western forms of – feminist theology in China has just been a short intermezzo.”<sup>64</sup>

When it comes to predictions of future trends, it seems possible that for Chinese women Protestants, women’s liberation through the church becomes only one of several possible avenues. Rather, it seems that the liberating quality of the Christian faith applies only to some congregations and was, as a trend for “the” Chinese Protestant church, short-lived. The emergence of proto-denominations with more visibly gendered church spaces than is customary in China’s registered Protestant churches could also have implications for the relationship between and attractiveness of registered and unregistered churches. In many ways, the differentiation between them does not carry beyond the technical fact of registration, but the question of female ordination could become one of the clearest differences between the two.

In China, moral rigidity and Puritan teachings characterize all churches, be they more charismatic or more reformed in their theology and liturgy. Conservative values seem to form a large part of the attraction that churches have in the contemporary Chinese context. One might argue that all Chinese Christians endorse very conservative family values and impose strict mores on their members. In this sense, Chinese Protestantism is perhaps best described as Puritan, whether it appears in “Pentecostal,” “Calvinist” or other disguise. Ultimately, it seems desirable that churches offer various roles both for women and men, be they more complementary or equal in nature. What has to be avoided is the emergence of an environment in which only conservative, limiting options are available to either women or men. Matters of face and “the done thing” still are of extraordinary importance for individuals in Chinese society with its collectivist and Confucian heritage, and in the current climate of resurfacing traditions, the emergence of traditional role models as the dominant and only option seems to be a potential danger. It is to be hoped that in the future, Chinese churches open themselves even more for male and female interpretations of theology and will be more sensitive to female and male spiritual and pastoral needs.

Researchers should be careful not to replicate the myopia exhibited by elite researchers that echoes, in many ways, the Confucian disrespect of the less literate, and exclude Chinese Christian women from their research. Rather, the various mechanisms with regards to gender currently at work within different parts of the Chinese Protestant church raise a number of questions worthy of research, some of which have implications that go beyond the male-female divide. For example, one latent concern both among Boss Christians and New Calvinists are questions of authority. In both cases, female believers are expected to

63 Hefner 2013, p. 27.

64 Gänßbauer 2001, pp. 68 and 72.

submit not only to God's authority, but also to the authority of their fellow male believers. Wenzhou's Boss Christians create elite male social occasions such as invitation-only banquets that assert their power and function as social spaces in which male Christians set the rules and are in charge, unlike the wider rest of society where Christians are often disadvantaged when it comes to questions of power and authority.<sup>65</sup> The New Calvinists, on the other hand, espouse alternative political values which include, for some of the more prominent believers, an endorsement of egalitarian democratic values that seems to contradict the internal authoritarian structure of the church, both regarding the relationship between men and women and the congregation as a whole.

Altogether, when looking at the roles of contemporary Chinese Protestant women, tradition plays a twofold role: First, the wish for moral guidance and spiritual values which fuels the interest in Protestantism as a whole also propels a return of traditional religious roles which can be limiting for women. To some extent, women choose these roles and are part and parcel of this production of gender roles. Secondly, the little scholarly interest Christian women have received so far mirrors traditional perceptions of religious women as uneducated bearers of the Little Tradition who do not merit further attention. Both phenomena, the dynamic interplay between modernization and the resurgence of tradition in the female religious context on the one hand and the perception of it on the other hand, deserve to be addressed in more detail in the future.

## References

- ANS (Amity News Service) 2003, "Rise, Deborah, Rise! Reflections on Women in the Chinese Church," in ANS, Vol. 12, Nos. 11-12, pp. 9-11, retrieved online at: [www.amityfoundation.org/eng/sites/default/files/Archive/ANS\\_2003\\_vol\\_12\\_11\\_12.pdf](http://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/sites/default/files/Archive/ANS_2003_vol_12_11_12.pdf) (last accessed December 23, 2014).
- Cao Nanlai 2011, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Cao Nanlai 2013, "Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity in China," in: Robert W. Hefner, *Global Pentecostalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 149-175.
- Cao Shengjie 2001, "Feminist Theology and the Chinese Church," in: *Chinese Theological Review*, Vol. 15, pp. 63-71.
- Chen Meilin 2003, "The Status and Role of Women in the Growing Church of China," in: *Chinese Theological Review*, Vol. 17, pp. 98-103.
- Dunn, Emily C 2008, "Cult, Church, and CCP: Introducing Eastern Lightning," in: *Modern China*, August 18, 2008, DOI: 10.1177/0097700408320546, document accessed on July 15, 2014 at: <http://mcx.sagepub.com/content/early/2008/08/18/0097700408320546>.

65 Cf. Cao 2011, pp. 107f.

- Fällman, Fredrik 2013, "Calvin, Culture and Christ? Developments of Faith among Chinese Intellectuals," in: Francis Khek Gee Lim (ed.), *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-cultural Perspectives*, Abingdon – New York: Routledge, pp. 153-168.
- Gänßbauer, Monika 2001, "Women in the Protestant Church in China – An Attempt to Describe the Situation at the Beginning of the 21st Century," in: *Berliner China-Hefte*, No. 21, pp. 68-73.
- Hefner, Robert W. 2013, "The Unexpected Modern – Gender, Piety, and Politics in the Global Pentecostal Surge," in: Robert W. Hefner (ed.), *Global Pentecostalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-36.
- Hunter, Alan – Chan Kim-Kwong 1993, *Protestantism in Contemporary China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jin Yanyan 金妍妍 2005, "Jidujiao de 'mada xianxiang' tanzhe – yi Henan Huangchuan Chengguan jiaohui wei kaocha duixiang 基督教的 '马大现象' 探折—以河南潢川城关教会为考察对象 (An Exploration into the 'Martha Phenomenon' [the Predominance of Women] of Protestant Christianity – A Case Study of Chengguan Church in Huangchuan, Henan)," in: *Chaohu xuebao* 巢湖学报, Vol. 7, No. 5 (General Series No.74), pp. 24-29.
- Kong Kit-Fan 2003, "Status Enhancement of Catholic Women in a Chinese Village," in: *Ching Feng* (new series), Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 79-98.
- Kwok Pui-Lan 1996, "Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in Daniel Bays (ed.), *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 194-208.
- Lee, Archie C.C. 1996, "Feminist Critique of the Bible and Female Principle in Culture," in: *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 240-252.
- Lutz, Jessie G. 2010, *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity and Social Mobility*, Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press.
- Martin, Bernice 2013, "Tensions and Trends in Pentecostal Family Relations," in: Robert W. Hefner (ed.), *Global Pentecostalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 115-148.
- Ng, Jessie Yim Han 2007, "Measuring the Impact of Self-Reformation Program on Women Pastors of Manchu Autonomous Counties (in China)," Asbury Theological Seminary 2007, Online dissertation to be retrieved at: <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1423&context=ecommonsatsdissertations> (last accessed December 23, 2014).
- Oblau, Gotthard 2005, "Pentecostal by Default? Contemporary Christianity in China," in: Allan Anderson – Edmund Tang (eds.), *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, Oxford: OCMS, pp. 411-435.
- Tao Feiya 陶飞亚 – Huang Wei 黄薇 2005, "Xingbie yu lishi: jindai funü yu jidujiao xueshu yantaohui zongshu 性别与历史: 近代妇女与基督教学术研讨会综述 (Gender and History – A Summary of the Symposium on Women and Christianity in Modern Times)," in: *Shanghai Daxue Xuebao, shehui kexueban* 上海大学学报, 社会科学版, Vol. 12, No. 6, pp. 100-104.

- Tong, Joy K.C. – Yang Fenggang 2014, “The Femininity of Chinese Christianity: A Study of a Chinese Charismatic Church and Its Female Leadership,” in: *Review of Religion and Chinese Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 195-211.
- Wang Yun 王韻 2014, “Nujiang Lisu zu funü zongjiao xinyang zhong de lunli guan-nian 怒江傈僳族妇女宗信仰的伦理观念 (Religious Ethics of Lisu Women Along the Nu River),” in: *Yunnan Nongye Daxue Xuebao, shehui kexueban* 云南农业大学学报, 社会科学版, No. 5, online document to be retrieved at: [www.cnki.net.caj-archiv.erf.sbb.spk.berlin.de.proxy.nationallizenzen.de/kcms/detail/53.1044.s.20140911.0902.051.html](http://www.cnki.net/caj-archiv.erf.sbb.spk.berlin.de.proxy.nationallizenzen.de/kcms/detail/53.1044.s.20140911.0902.051.html) (last accessed August 31, 2014).
- Watson, Rubie S. 1994, “Girls’ Houses and Working Women: Expressive Culture in the Pearl River Delta, 1900–41,” in: Maria Jaschok – Suzanne Miers (eds.), *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude and Escape*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, pp. 25-41.
- Wommack, Timothy R. 2006, “The Women House Church Leaders of China: Interviews with a Muted Group,” Lynchburg University 2006, Online dissertation, to be retrieved at: <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1163&context=masters> (last accessed December 23, 2014).
- Wu Jinzhen 2001, “Looking for Meaning Beyond Mere Existence – Women and Church Development in China,” in: *Chinese Theological Review*, Vol. 15, pp. 72-87.
- Xu Shaoqiang 1990, “Woguo jidujiaohui nüxinghua yuanyin chutan (Preliminary Discussion of the Feminization of the Christian Church in China),” in: *Lilun yu dang-dai*, No. 10, pp. 12-14 [quoted in Hunter – Chan 1993, p. 174 without Chinese characters].

## “The Monastery Will Be a Chinese House”: The Inculturation of the Church in China from the Perspective of the History of Catholic Monasticism

Matteo Nicolini-Zani

### 1. Introduction

The history of the Christian monastic presence in China between the nineteenth and the twentieth century offers a peculiar, even if still neglected or undervalued, perspective on the process of inculturation of the Catholic Church in China in history.<sup>1</sup> Reviewing some pages of this history through the lens of inculturation would offer stimulating insights from the past of the Catholic Church in China to the contemporary Chinese Catholic Church.

In China like elsewhere, the monastic life has been and should be an essential part of the life of the Church and participates in its mission of evangelization. The inseparability of monastic life and the mission of the Church has been reiterated and developed in the years following Vatican II, with emphasis on community life as the specific form of monastic witness.<sup>2</sup> Contemplation and mission are inseparable. In this perspective, monasteries are both places of contemplation and places of activity and of mission, not in the sense that they allow themselves to become involved in the pastoral activities of the Church, but in the sense that they are places in which prayer is at the core of the Christian life and in which silence and listening offer a pedagogy to those who seek regeneration or who want to explore their own interior world.

This is the mission entrusted to the monastics in *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life issued by the Second Vatican Council in 1965, which deals specifically with institutes of consecrated life in the Catholic Church: “Monasteries are like nurseries of edification for the Christian people.”<sup>3</sup> Through liturgy and

1 This is the English original (provided by the author) of the paper presented in Chinese at the Conference “Matteo Ricci and Nanchang: Inculturation of the Church in China,” held at Nanchang 南昌 (Jiangxi 江西) on March 28–29, 2017. For an outline history of the Christian monastic foundation in China, see: Matteo Nicolini-Zani, *Christian Monks on Chinese Soil. A History of Monastic Missions to China*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press 2016.

2 Cf. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, “Missione,” in: Angel Aparicio Rodríguez – Joan María Canal Casas (eds.), *Dizionario teologico della vita consacrata*, Milan: Ancora 1994, pp. 1038-1063, here 1049. Cf. also the summary of the theology of the contemplative/monastic life given in Jean Leclercq, “Monachisme chrétien et missions,” in: *Studia Missionalia* 28 (1979), pp. 133-152, in particular pp. 142-147.

3 Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis* 9; also found in: John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* 8.

hospitality, contemplation becomes activity and mission. Monasticism, therefore, insofar as it is an ecclesial entity, partakes of the Church's intrinsically missionary nature. To put it another way, monasticism participates in the life of the Church, which is in itself mission.<sup>4</sup>

Over time there was a better understanding that “the role of monasticism is to bring monastic life to the missions, with all that it entails for the life of a Church, and not to do something else there.”<sup>5</sup> As this point became even clearer, attention was also given to the question of the inculturation of monasticism in other cultural and spiritual settings, or, in the words of the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church of the Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes* (1965), the question of how to live monastic life “in a way accommodated to the truly religious traditions of the people.”<sup>6</sup> This issue involves a reflection on how a monastery in a particular land shall become a place where those whom God has called to the monastic life can experience and live out the monastic life in their own country according to the cultural, religious, and spiritual forms that are most congenial to them.

Among the many voices involved in this reflection I will here mention briefly only that of the Benedictine Théodore Nève (1879–1963), abbot of the Abbey of Saint Andrew in Belgium, who was involved in the enterprise of establishing a monastery in China. He emphasized that monastic life can only be missionary if it radically lives out the *forma vitae*, the form of life that is proper to coenobites. Starting out from this fundamental conviction, Abbot Nève outlined the elements that a monastery in mission must ensure so that “it can be planted and sprout,” that is, become autonomous. Such autonomy, correctly interpreted, is in fact the ultimate goal, for it is the sign that a community has roots and will develop.

*What, then is the role of monasticism in mission lands today? First of all, it must be planted and sprout. The apostolic movement that urges a monastery to found others does not have for its object the establishment of branches of the mother-house, but rather the establishment of new families, which, in the measure that they have their own recruitment, become autonomous.*<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Toward a Chinese Christian Monasticism

With this missiological and monastic reflection in the background, we can better understand the courageous establishment of several communities and monastic orders on Chi-

4 Cf. Sandra Mazzolini, “Missione e monachesimo. Una prospettiva missiologica,” in: Conrad Leyser – Hannah Williams (eds.), *Mission and Monasticism. Acts of the International Symposium at the Pontifical Athenaeum S. Anselmo, Rome, May 7–9, 2009*, Rome: Pontificio Ateneo Sant’Anselmo – Sankt Ottilien: EOS 2013, pp. 197–210, in particular pp. 203–204.

5 Leclercq, “Monachisme chrétien et missions,” p. 146.

6 Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes* 40.

7 Théodore Nève, “De la fondation de monastères en terre de mission,” in: *Autour du problème de l’adaptation. Compte rendu de la quatrième semaine de missiologie de Louvain (1926)*, Louvain: Éditions du Museum Lessianum 1926, pp. 36–46, here p. 40.

nese soil in a period between roughly 1869, the year of the founding of the first Carmel on Chinese soil, and 1955, the year when the last foreign nuns were forced to leave China. Carmelites, Trappists, and Benedictines had a fruitful life in modern China. With them, the half-monastic and half-apostolic religious families of the Chinese Little Brothers of Saint John the Baptist and the Little Sisters of Therese of the Child Jesus, founded by Vincent Lebbe (1877–1940), gave a luminous witness to the possibility of giving birth to a Catholic monasticism with Chinese features.

I would like to summarize briefly the reflections of some of the persons who were directly or indirectly involved in helping to initiate and then to continue the relations between that part of the Church that is monasticism and Chinese culture. Starting from the 1920s, for the first time in the history of Catholic missiology consideration was given to the prospect of a “Chinese Christian monasticism,”<sup>8</sup> and the reflection focused mainly on the compatibility of Christian monasticism with the spirituality of China and the possibility of Christian monastic life taking root in Chinese soil.

For this to happen, it was necessary above all that the monks be and remain Chinese. The statement may seem obvious, but in fact for many years in mission countries candidates for the monastic life, and for religious life in general, were expected to separate themselves from their cultural roots and assume, if possible, those forms of religious life that had been developed in the West and were transplanted without change to mission lands.

The ultimate goal of this process of “indigenization” was that over time the entire monastic community, including the superior, should be Chinese. “It is more natural and more in keeping with the Catholic spirit that a monastery be governed by a superior from that country, and this is what we must strive for,” wrote Louis Brun (1876–1942), the abbot of the Trappist abbey of Our Lady of Consolation in Yangjiaping 楊家坪.<sup>9</sup>

The question that, for the most part, remained in the background was: “In what way should the encounter between Western monastic life and the local cultural context take place?” In other words, just how should one go about the process of “adaptation,” or “inculturation,” as it was later called?

Although it was certainly necessary to start from the Christian monastic tradition that had been developed up to that point west of China, this tradition, stripped down to essential elements, in other words, stripped as much as possible of specifically Western cultural elements, was now carried over, transported, and delivered to the Chinese context, because that would allow it to be reborn in a “new form.”

In the 1920s and 1930s this requirement became clear to the founders and leaders of the monastic communities who were already present in China. Among the Trappists, for example, this readiness to adapt was particularly evident at the time of the first monastic foundations in the Far East. The history of the first foundations in the Far East gradually

8 “For a Chinese [Christian] Monasticism” was the title of an editorial in the *Bulletin des Missions* of 1927 (“Pour un monachisme chinois,” in: *Bulletin des Missions* 8 [1926–1927], p. 257).

9 Louis Brun, “La vie contemplative en Chine,” in: Alphonse Hübner, *Une trappe en Chine*, Peking: Imprimerie des Lazaristes 1933, p. 95.

taught the Trappists to confront the necessity of adaptation and to understand what Louis-Brun wrote in the 1930s.

*Although the monastery depends on an order and is bound through its mother-house with the Abbey of Cîteaux, [... it] is, nevertheless, a local and autonomous institution, which, transplanted from another place, must put out its roots in and be nourished by elements of the place where it finds itself and thus become a natural product of it [...] The adaptation of Catholic monasticism to China, so that it becomes a natural product, cannot be the work of one day.<sup>10</sup>*

In the Benedictine world, Abbot Théodore Nève stated that what guarantees that a foundation will be able to “adapt” to the context in which it is located is its degree of autonomy and that the visible manifestation of this “adaptation” is “constructing a monastery in the style of the country in which it is built” and, above all, that the novitiate is “open and adapted to indigenous vocations.”

*A monastery, in order to be a monastery, must plunge its roots into the deep strata of the soil on which it builds. As long as a monastery in a mission country lives only thanks to the continual addition of European blood, its life is precarious. Sooner or later our monasteries must become indigenous [...] Thanks to this the monks and the abbot will quickly become natives and then they will be able to fine-tune regional adaptations of observance, to which the general lines of the monastic rule leave enough space so that it can really be a garb made to measure.<sup>11</sup>*

The most prophetic Benedictine voice to speak in favour of the adaptation of Christian monasticism in China was undoubtedly that of Jehan Joliet (1870–1937), whose project for a monastery that would be genuinely Chinese showed that he did not want “to import from the West a monasticism that was ‘already complete’ and apply it to China; rather, China, on its own, should restart the Christian monastic experience, and itself draw on the essential principles of the Rule of St. Benedict to produce a monasticism that is authentically Chinese.”<sup>12</sup> Joliet was well aware of the daring nature of the task, as he confessed in a letter of 1928:

*It is not to be thought that a real adaptation in practice, not one in letters and speeches, will be easy or agreeable. It is an effort continually renewed; it demands renunciation in many ways harder and more complete than that of religious vows because it is exercised in a field to which one has not vowed oneself explicitly and against which may arise the opposition of a holy and necessary sentiment of attachment to the customs of one’s original community.<sup>13</sup>*

This task was all the more difficult to realize because, as Joliet recognized when he wrote to Abbot Nève two years later, it called on the Western monastic, and particularly Bene-

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96 and 103.

11 Nève, “De la fondation de monastères en terre de mission,” pp. 43-44.

12 Henri-Philippe Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet (1870–1937). Un projet de monachisme bénédictin chinois*, Paris: Cerf 1988, p. 197.

13 Letter of Jehan Joliet to Édouard Neut, 2 October 1928, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, pp. 161-162.

dictine, tradition to do away with the “Latin habit” that had been worn for centuries, and to put on a “Chinese habit.”

*I know the present discipline of the Benedictine Order, but I believed that we were in China in order to adapt ourselves [...] Gradually, more and more you want to have us copy what is done in Europe, in order to bring to [the Chinese] an up-to-date version, a ready habit, a modern ensemble of Western monasticism of the twentieth century, while the points of contact and of suture between China and monasticism lie much more in antiquity.<sup>14</sup>*

The desire to resolve this basic tension seemed to motivate all Joliet’s labours in China. As he bitterly noted, and as the events occurred to the monastery of Xishan 西山 show, the degree of freedom and autonomy that Joliet felt was needed in order to implement his proposal for a Chinese form of monasticism was not always understood, and consequently not always granted, by superiors. He believed that if monasticism was to remain faithful to its own vocation it had to be “without works.” A monastic presence in China, therefore, ought to remain without a direct mission, and monastic identity in China was not to be overshadowed by a missionary identity. Jehan Joliet believed that only in this way could the monastery fulfil its true function in China: “To be, through its capacity for intellectual and spiritual stimulation, a place of encounter and osmosis between Chinese culture and the Gospel.”<sup>15</sup>

### 3. The Benedictine Monastery of Xishan (Sichuan): A Case Study

To show the difficult tension between tradition and innovation, western models and Chinese adaptations, institutional frames and space for freedom, we will focus on the case of the Benedictine monastery of Xishan, Sichuan.

Had it not been for Jehan Joliet, a French Benedictine monk of Solesmes, no one would have conceived, awaited, and finally realized an authentic, at least as proposed, Chinese Benedictine monastery, which, even though founded by foreigners, would be “with its prominent Chinese character [...] in every aspect a Chinese house,” as wrote Joliet himself.<sup>16</sup> When the founder of the monastery of Xishan died, its prior, Raphaël Vinciarelli, summed up the essential character of this man and his work.

*Dom Joliet’s personality was full of energy, entirely at the service of an idea that had matured over thirty years and that he was able to bring to life. To introduce*

14 Letter of Jehan Joliet to Théodore Nève, 27 November 1930, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, pp. 202-203.

15 Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, p. 306.

16 Jehan Joliet, “A Project for a Chinese Monastery (1922),” in: Nicolini-Zani, *Christian Monks on Chinese Soil*, Appendix 2, pp. 321-325, here p. 325. On the person of Jehan Joliet, see especially the biography of Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*. See also: Un moine de Saint-André, “Dom Jehan Joliet,” in: *Les Cahiers de Saint-André* 1 (1938) 1, pp. 30-52 (also republished as a pamphlet); Raphaël Vinciarelli, “Dom Jehan Joliet et son œuvre monastique en Chine,” in: *Contemplation et Apostolat* 1938, no. 10, pp. 6\*-11\*; “Dom Jehan Joliet,” in: *Bulletin M.E.P.* 1938, pp. 245-247; Henri-Philippe Delcourt, “Dom Jehan Joliet (1870-1937). Un projet de monachisme bénédictin chinois,” in: *Mélanges de science religieuse* 43 (1986) 1, pp. 3-19; Henri-Philippe Delcourt, “The Grain Dies in China,” in: *AIM Bulletin* 1986, no. 40, pp. 45-55.

*in China a monastic life whose roots would seek the original currents of Chinese civilization: this was his aim, this is Si-Shan [Xishan].<sup>17</sup>*



Hebachang 河坝场, major seminary, September 1937. Jehan Joliet, first prior of Xishan 西山 (centre), with Raphaël Vinciarelli, third prior (right), and Vincent Martin (left). Photo: Archive of the Benedictine Abbey of Sint-Andries (Saint-André), Bruges.

The years from 1917 to 1926 were a period of slow incubation of the “Chinese dream” of Jehan Joliet. During that time what was happening in Joliet’s personal life and in the Church brought about a maturation of his China project, but his vision remained basically the same:

*[My project] is the foundation of a monastery in China with the same orientation of life as at Solesmes, that is, first of all the Divine Office and prayer, normally without a ministry or travels, and intellectual work as the principal work. But there is no monastery without monks, and naturally what will be necessary in the end will be Chinese monks, and to have true Chinese monks, it is necessary that the foundation, made entirely by Europeans, adopt resolutely and clearly everything from China except sin.<sup>18</sup>*

The project was extremely clear for him from the very beginning, but, provided that the monastery will be a Chinese monastery, no plans were arranged in advance. In 1924 Joliet wrote: “My dream would be to go there with the fewest possible precise projects for or against a form or a work [...] What I hope is that there be no haste, that decisions aren’t made before living there.”<sup>19</sup>

However, Joliet’s dream about China would not have come true if he had not found a monastic community willing to carry out his plan on Chinese soil and to provide the necessary personnel and means. In Belgium the Abbey of Saint Andrew was the monastery most naturally suited to the monastic missionary project that Joliet had cultivated and refined over the years. Finally, in 1927, after almost thirty years silently waiting and praying for this day, Joliet’s dream became a reality. Théodore Nève, abbot of Saint Andrew, first informed Celso Costantini, the apostolic delegate in China (1922–1933), of the decision

17 Vinciarelli, “Dom Jehan Joliet et son œuvre monastique en Chine,” p. 6\*.

18 Letter of Jehan Joliet to Charles Rey, 30 August 1917, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, p. 69.

19 Letter of Jehan Joliet to Charles Rey, 3 August 1924, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, p. 88.

with a letter that is worth citing, since it shows that in this first phase Nève and Joliet had a substantially similar vision. It also demonstrates consonance with the missionary ideal of Costantini.

*We would like to bring Benedictine monastic life to the Chinese and to found a monastery in a native vicariate [...] We would like this monastery to adapt itself as well as possible to Chinese customs. The Rule of St. Benedict is sufficiently broad to permit this adaptation naturally [...] The Lord will indicate the time when we can send Fr. Joliet the help that he will need [...] so as to allow him to form quickly a local community in which the European fathers will have no other desire but to be Chinese with the Chinese.*<sup>20</sup>

The same tune is found in the words of Abbot Nève addressed to two Belgian monks leaving for China in 1928: “Become Chinese with the Chinese. Try to adapt yourselves to the uses and customs of the country, doing so to the extent that you judge appropriate and prudent.”<sup>21</sup>

This, of course, was based on the ground of a clear consciousness, namely that, for a monastery, the first duty for being a part of the body of the Church is to be faithful to its nature, the same nature in China as elsewhere. There is no monastic life without genuine fraternal life and communal liturgical prayer. But the main issues and tensions at stake in this process of adaptation to the Chinese context were many and different, such as the architecture of the new-built monastery, the formation given to Chinese postulants and novices and the liturgy performed by the community. Let us consider these issues briefly.



Xishan 西山, 1932.

The Benedictine priory of Sts. Peter and Andrew, seen from the north. In the foreground, the rectangular building that housed the novitiate, monastic refectory, chapter room, cloakroom, library, and monastic cells. Behind it, the chapel (right) and guest parlours (left).

Photo: Archive of the Benedictine Abbey of Sint-Andries (Saint-André), Bruges.

20 Letter of Théodore Nève to Celso Costantini, 15 February 1927, in: Christian Papeians de Morchoven, *Labbaye de Saint-André Zevenkerken*, vol. 2: *Un défi relevé par dom Théodore Nève*, Tiel: Lannoo 2002, p. 192.

21 Cited in: Papeians de Morchoven, *Labbaye de Saint-André Zevenkerken*, vol. 2, pp. 203-204.

Regarding the building of the monastery, photos better than words can show what was done at that time in Xishan. “Nothing great,” as it was written, “but in very good taste and completely in local style.”<sup>22</sup> The building, whose architecture was inspired by the layout of traditional Chinese houses, consisted of two rectangular buildings that were twenty meters long and had black tiled roofs. The first building was primarily for hospitality, with a reception hall, visiting rooms, and guest rooms. In the back was the chapel, with altars decorated in Chinese style, and the sacristy, where there was a reliquary of St. Therese of



Xishan 西山, 1932.

Above: The exterior of the reception centre for guests at the priory of Sts. Peter and Andrew. Photo: Archive of the Benedictine Abbey of Sint-Andries (Saint-André), Bruges.



Left: The Chinese-style chapel of the priory of Sts. Peter and Andrew. Photo: Archive of the Benedictine Abbey of Sint-Andries (Saint-André), Bruges.

22 Un moine de Saint-André, “Dom Jehan Joliet,” p. 11.

the Child Jesus, the design of which was also Chinese. The second building contained the various monastic areas: chapter hall, refectory, recreation room, and monastic cells. The surrounding land, enclosed by a wall, included a garden, a grove of fruit trees (oranges, tangerines, and peaches), and a vineyard.<sup>23</sup>



Xishan 西山, 1932.

Left: The inner courtyard in front of the chapel of the priory of Sts. Peter and Andrew. Photo: Archive of the Benedictine Abbey of Sint-Andries (Saint-André), Bruges.

Below: The Benedictine priory of Sts. Peter and Andrew, seen from the south. The entrance of the monastery is clearly visible, as are the monastery properties on the hill in the background. Photo: Archive of the Benedictine Abbey of Sint-Andries (Saint-André), Bruges.



23 Cf. Ma Wan Sang, “Le Monastère de Si shan en Chine,” in: *Bulletin des Missions* 13 (1934), supp. no. 1: *Le Courrier de l’Apostolat Monastique*, pp. 4\*-14\* (with photograph); and Théodore Nève, “Le monastère des SS. Pierre et André de Si-Shan,” in: *Bulletin des Missions* 15 (1936), supp. no. 1: *Le Courrier de l’Apostolat Monastique*, pp. 6\*-11\*.

When Jehan Joliet moved to an hermitage near Xishan in 1934 after his forced retirement as prior, his successor, Gabriel Roux (1900–1936), continuing the line of inculturation tirelessly promoted by his predecessor, was assiduously devoted to studying the Chinese language. His deep love of the culture of the country deepened his desire for a monastery that would look and feel Chinese. He made every effort to add interior decorations and furnishings that complemented the Chinese architectural style of the monastic buildings. To this end he commissioned a young sculptor to carve crosses and candelabra for the chapel in the best Chinese style from the stone of the surrounding mountains. Jehan Joliet’s insistence on giving monastic life in Xishan as much of a Chinese character as possible was now fully assimilated by the community.

*The buildings are entirely Chinese – inside and outside. At Sishan [Xishan] even the church is decorated in the Chinese style, and the Gothic vestments, designed by one of the fathers, are made in Chinese embroidery. The monks wear Chinese dress, eat Chinese meals (with chopsticks), and, with the exception of the Holy Mass and the Divine Office, chant the prayers in Chinese.*<sup>24</sup>

The formation of postulants and novices was the key to achieving the kind of “Chinese-style” monasticism envisioned by Jehan Joliet. From the time of his arrival in China, his main concern had been that the “door be wide open, from day one, to all those who *vere quaerunt Deum*.”<sup>25</sup> “If you want a Chinese monastery, [...] a Chinese novitiate is essential.”<sup>26</sup> At the end of 1927 Joliet wrote to Abbot Nève, dwelling at length on the issue.

*How are [the postulants] to be received? Sending them to Saint Andrew, it seems to me, is impracticable under the present circumstances [...] If I were to suggest to these postulants that they, or at least some of them, could go to make their novitiate in Belgium, I can see their profound dismay: “You too, you are like the others, you want to westernize us, you will not treat us as equals unless you form us in isolation outside China” [...] Suppose that this is ignored and that some will certainly come to Belgium [...] and that they return to China as excellent monks. Since the best were chosen to be sent and since they had a good formation, it is inevitable that they will be given positions of authority and will have influence, and this will confirm the others and the laypeople in their preconceptions, without calculating the division in the monastery itself [...] To accept postulants a novitiate is needed here, and only with the assurance of having a novitiate open can we deal seriously with these budding vocations [...] In sum, what we urgently demand is [for you] to press Rome for the opening of a novitiate as soon as we are established in Sze-Chwan [Sichuan], this very year.*<sup>27</sup>

24 *Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Thaddeus Yang*, cited in: David J. Endres, “The Legacy of Thaddeus Yang,” in: *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34 (2010) 1, pp. 23-27, here p. 24.

25 Letter of Jehan Joliet to Gaston Aubourg, 3 July 1928, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, p. 151. Joliet refers to the passage of the Rule of St. Benedict that asks that the candidate for monastic life be examined to determine if *revera Deum quaerit* (“he truly seeks God”: Rule of St. Benedict 58,7).

26 Letter of Jehan Joliet to Théodore Nève, 26 September 1928, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, p. 158.

27 Letter of Jehan Joliet to Théodore Nève, 6 December 1927, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, pp. 126-127.

As has been mentioned, Rome gave permission to have a canonical novitiate on site, which was opened in 1930. However, the kind of formation that would be given in this novitiate was a further source of misunderstanding between Joliet and Abbot Nève. According to canon law, it was not possible to begin studies for priestly ordination without being *inferioribus disciplinis rite instructi*,<sup>28</sup> that is, without having a basic knowledge of Latin. It was Joliet's firm conviction, gained over the years, that it was “difficult and disastrous to impose on the Chinese a European training as an essential preparation for the priesthood.”<sup>29</sup> Even before the arrival of the first Chinese postulants, he proposed that monastic profession be separated from priestly ordination, and that those who demonstrated an aptitude for the monastic life, but were not suited for language studies and philosophy, be allowed to enter the novitiate and make monastic profession. Joliet was against the division of the community into two categories of monks, so he made a bold proposal:

*My wish always has been to have only one category of monks, period. This is completely Chinese and it avoids the danger of two castes, those of the choir (Europeans with some rare Chinese) and the other, the mass of Chinese lay-brothers [...] I am decided [...] in this sense [...] From the beginning of their postulancy they would come to the choir with us, learning the psalms by heart or reading them transcribed phonetically in Chinese.*<sup>30</sup>

The correspondence between Joliet and Nève shows how important this issue was. The attitude of the abbot of Saint Andrew was defensive, invoking canon law and Church discipline rather than demonstrating an understanding of the real situation:

*Your difficulties arise from a misunderstanding. It is not a matter of working for the glory of Saint Andrew or of Saint Peter of Solesmes rather than following your own will. Rome has made me responsible for the foundation of Si-Shan [Xishan] and not for its prior. The foundation charter foresees this. Si-Shan is a simple priory dependent in everything on its mother abbey. As a result, it has to develop according to the spirit and the letter of the constitutions of Saint Andrew unless it has special privileges.*<sup>31</sup>

In front of this opposition, Joliet decided to go his own way, no longer consulting the abbot regarding the acceptance of applications for entry into the novitiate and admission to first monastic profession. However, since he was unable to find persons able to ensure the formation of postulants and novices, all of them eventually left the monastery. Then there was the question of learning French. Joliet asked and obtained that only the most talented be required to learn it.

If Gabriel Roux, the successor of Jehan Joliet, followed his predecessor in what concerned the architectural style of the monastery, he did not do the same in what concerned the monastic formation. In this field he strictly followed the directions given by Saint

28 *Codex Iuris Canonici Pii X Pontificis Maximi*, n.p.: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1932, canon 589, p. 176.

29 Letter of Jehan Joliet to Théodore Nève, 9 April 1930, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, p. 191.

30 Letter of Jehan Joliet to Gaston Aubourg, 8 October 1929, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, p. 184.

31 Letter of Théodore Nève to Jehan Joliet, 21 February 1931, in: Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, p. 204.

Andrew regarding the monastic education of candidates. A school for oblates was opened to provide a basic education to future monks. All the proposals made in previous years by Joliet were therefore abandoned.

The second successor of Joliet as prior of the community, Raphaël Vinciarelli (1897–1972), although urged by Joliet to pursue his ideal of “monastic life alone,” continued to implement the Saint Andrew vision of “apostolic ministry” by opening an elementary school and a dispensary for the inhabitants of the surrounding area. His ideal of adaptation to the Chinese context, if there should be any, was much more prudent than Joliet’s enthusiastic view. For Vinciarelli, the process of adaptation to Chinese ways had to be careful and gradual.

*If an adaptation is to be made, let it be made slowly, naturally, in the course of experience. But let us not say: let us change, let us adapt. The Chinese are themselves occupied in adapting to European life. They are changing many things. Let them go on and let us wait. There is one adaptation necessary, to love them and to make them feel this.<sup>32</sup>*

Absolute importance of “cooperation” and “dialogue” between the different parts and the right balance between “autonomy” and “communion” between them: the case of the Benedictine monastic undertaking at Xishan is a clear historical evidence of these needs in any process of inculturation of the Church. If there soon arose a lack of openness to dialogue between the “centre” and the “periphery,” between the impulse for innovation and the brakes of institutionalization, it cannot but be acknowledged that something was already lacking during the preliminary phase of the project. Even though it had been prepared over a long period of time by someone as insightful and committed as Jehan Joliet, his China project was unsuccessful because preparation for it was the work of a lone man who failed to engage his superiors and his community in an honest and open dialogue on its main components. As noted by one who was most familiar with the “Joliet project,” “while Dom Joliet was personally prepared to face difficulties, what was lacking was communal reflection and preparation, a gathering that would have brought together superiors and members of a planning committee to discuss and come to a joint decision about a work that could only be successful if it was communally planned and implemented.”<sup>33</sup>

## 4. Conclusion

The past history of Christian monasticism in China basically shows that the process of its development in the Chinese cultural context required a bold spiritual attitude of openness to the future and a willingness to accept the transformation of monastic forms that had been received from Western tradition. Unfortunately, because of external conditions, there were only twenty years in which to translate into projects, choices, and concrete achievements the awareness of the necessity for immediate adaptation and inculturation.

32 Letter of Raphaël Vinciarelli, 19 April 1935, in: Papeians de Morchoven, *Labbaye de Saint-André Zevenkerken*, vol. 2, p. 220.

33 Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, p. 272.

Even the most successful undertakings remained, at best, in the experimental stage. There was no time for them to become institutionalized. The exodus from China imposed on foreign monks in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the inability of Chinese monks and nuns to live a monastic life in the subsequent years were thus the main obstacle to the development of a Chinese monasticism.

Nevertheless, realizations, tensions, experiments, and even mistakes that occurred in the past can be a reference point for the Chinese Church today and tomorrow in its process of steadily becoming a Church with both Chinese eyes and a Catholic heart. As Jehan Joliet put it, “It is precisely because we want to found a monastery that is fully *Catholic* that we wish it to be *Chinese*.”<sup>34</sup> With the sincere hope that one day, God willing it be soon, monastic communities will again bloom from the seed still hidden beneath the earth of China and contribute to this process.

---

34 Cited *ibid.*, p. 209 (emphasis added).

## Imprint – Legal Notice

ISSN 2192-9289

**Publisher:**

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

**Managing editors:**

Katharina Feith, Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

**Assistant editor and layout:**

Eveline Warode

**Web editor:**

Jan Kwee

**Collaborators of this issue:**

Sr. Jacqueline Mulberge SSPS  
Fr. David Streit SVD

**Calligraphy:**

Yang Xusheng

**Editorial submission deadline:**

August 31, 2017

**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](http://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.

