

## “Everything is related”

### The 10th European Catholic China Colloquium in Siegburg focused on *Laudato Si'*, Technoscience and the Church in China

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“Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely,” wrote Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, referring to the technological possibilities of the present. China is one of the world’s leading nations in the development and especially the application of artificial intelligence and other new technologies. What are the consequences of technological progress for humanity, how do we arrive at an ethic of dealing with it, what is China’s role? What do the new technologies mean for society and churches in China? This question was addressed at the 10th European Catholic China Colloquium, which took place in Siegburg, Germany, from 30th August to 1st September 2019.

For Pope Francis, “everything is related” – emphasized Professor Massimo Borghesi of the University of Perugia in his lecture. In *Laudato Si'*, this “relational model” stands in



Group photo of the participants of the conference with the Cologne Auxiliary Bishop Dr. Dominikus Schwaderlapp (center). Photo: Václav Mucha SVD.

contrast to the technocratic model that alienates humankind from its environment. In this regard, during the conference a clear connection to traditional Chinese philosophy became visible: there, human persons are always seen in their relationships with others and are defined by relationship; human beings and the world are seen as a single continuous process. At the end of his lecture, the sinologist Dr. Heinrich Geiger called for a “parcel” of Western and non-Western traditions to be put together in a respectful manner in order to promote a global awareness of our common home.

After this theological-philosophical introduction, Mao Yishu of the Mercator Institute for China Studies in Berlin described in concrete terms how artificial intelligence has already penetrated all areas of life in China – from artificial newsreaders to its application in jurisprudence, healthcare, education and security. Since 2018, government documents on AI ethics have been published. But according to Mao Yishu, there is still a pluralism of opinions among Chinese experts and the priorities of values also differ from those of the West.

Professor Fu King-wa, a media researcher from the University of Hong Kong, analysed “China’s ‘360-degree’ information control.” He distinguished three levels: “Control 1.0” consists of state surveillance and censorship of the Internet and social media. In “Control 2.0,” the Chinese State actively influences public opinion and user behaviour, for example by manipulating topic rankings or purchased comments in social media. “Control 3.0” is expanding from online behaviour to everyday life. One example is the Social Credit System which will enter fully into force by 2020. It will evaluate people’s behaviour in all areas of life and condition it through punitive measures such as travel restrictions.

A further lecture pointed out that the age of mobile communication also offers new opportunities for evangelization in China: It presented a Catholic app from China and explained its features and functionalities.

In a second thematic block the conference dealt with the situation of the Catholic Church in China. Like the other religions of China, it is affected by ever stronger control by the state authorities. Fr. Bernardo Cervellera PIME, of the Roman news agency *AsiaNews*, reported on this subject. The Chinese state demands that the religions become “sinicized.” Dr. Li Jingxi, vice-rector of the Shaanxi Catholic Seminary, Prof. Dr. Batairwa Kubuya Paulin SX of the Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei and Daniel Yeung of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies in Hong Kong discussed the topic of sinicization/inculturation of the Church in China. Prof. Wang Meixiu of the Institute for World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx CICM of the Verbiest Institute of the Catholic University of Leuven spoke about the future of the Church after the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops concluded one year ago.

Around one hundred participants from 15 countries and regions, including Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, attended the colloquium in Siegburg. The event took place at the Katholisch-Soziales Institut on the Michaelsberg. It was organized by the Catholic China-Zentrum in Sankt Augustin.

A German version of this text was published at [www.china-zentrum.de/artikel/details/alles-ist-miteinander-verbunden](http://www.china-zentrum.de/artikel/details/alles-ist-miteinander-verbunden).