

News Update on Religion and Church in China June 29 – October 29, 2023

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The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2023, No. 3, pp. 3-19) covered the period March 25 – July 15, 2023.

General

August 9, 2023:

Sixth Tone reports: Parents hiring their children as “full-time children”

Due to the high unemployment rate among young people, according to *Sixth Tone* on August 9, there is a growing trend in China whereby parents “hire” their adult children to do household chores and care for younger siblings as well as older family members and provide them with a monthly salary in return pay. Among such “full-time children” (全职儿女) there are many university graduates who have not yet found a suitable job or are preparing for further exams. According to *Sixth Tone*, the topic has been intensively discussed on social media since last year. Sometimes they are simply young people who want to look after their parents and grandparents. Reactions on social media range from support to accusations of *kenlao* 啃老, i.e., continuing to sponge off their parents (*Sixth Tone* Aug. 9). *kf*

August 16, 2023:

China.Table: Government conceals figures on unemployed young people

As *China.Table* reported on August 16, Chinese statistics no longer include youth unemployment figures. Only the overall unemployment rate will be published. Unemployment among 16- to 24-year-olds has recently risen sharply – reaching a high of 21.3%, according to *AsiaNews*. *China.Table* writes that observers see the change in statistics as an attempt to downplay the major problems faced by young people in the labor market. The overall urban unemployment rate was 5.3% in July (*AsiaNews* Aug. 16; *Caixin Global Daily Chart* Aug. 15; *China.Table* Aug. 16). *kf*

September 10, 2023:

Hangzhou: Parents receive bonuses when a third child is born

In order to counteract the low birth rates, parents will receive a one-time payment of 25,000 RMB for the birth of a third child from September 10, and 7,000 RMB for a second child. Similar bonuses exist in other cities such as Shenzhen, where parents receive RMB 19,000 over three years for a third and subsequent children. According to the Hangzhou Municipal Health Commission, the birth rate for second-born children falls every year. Local media reported that in 2022, second-borns accounted for 35.94% of all births. In 2015, before the one-child policy was relaxed, the proportion was 38.77%. Hangzhou has also sought to increase its population in recent years through property purchasing benefits for families with three or more children and relaxations on household registration. Like many places in China, the high cost of raising a child is cited as the main reason for the low birth rate. Hangzhou ranks third among Chinese cities after Shanghai and Beijing with RMB 720,000 to raise a child, according to a 2022 report by YuWa Population Research in Zhejiang Province (*Sixth Tone* Aug. 8; <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1013483>). *kf*

Human Rights

September 21, 2023:

Dui Hua Foundation confirms the sentence of Uyghur ethnologist Rahile Dawut to life imprisonment

A source in the Chinese government has confirmed that Professor Rahile Dawut is currently serving a life sentence for endangering state security, the San Francisco-based Dui Hua Foundation reported on September 21. She was also deprived of political rights for life. Dui Hua said it had previously learned that Rahile Dawut had been charged and convicted by an Intermediate People's Court in Xinjiang in December 2018, one year after her detention, for the crime of "splittism" – a crime of endangering state security – and that she had lodged an appeal. According to the most recent information her appeal was subsequently rejected by Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region High People's Court, thus Dui Hua. The length of the prison sentence has only now been confirmed by a reliable source in the Chinese government as, according to Dui Hua, trials in cases of splittism are held in secret.

Rahile Dawut was a professor at Xinjiang University College of Humanities at the time of her detention in December 2017, according to Dui Hua. She founded the Ethnic Minorities Research Center at the university in 2007 and has conducted field work throughout Xinjiang. She has published widely on Uyghur folklore. The 57-year-old well-known ethnologist is a long-time member of the Chinese Communist Party and has received awards and grants from China's Ministry of Culture, Dui further reported. "Professor Rahile Dawut joins the long and growing list of Uyghur intellectuals — by one count more than 300 — who have been detained, arrested, and imprisoned since 2016," according to the Dui Hua Foundation (<https://duihua.org/life-sentence-for-professor-rahile-dawut-confirmed>). *kwt*

Religious Policy

August 11 and September 7, 2023:

***Bitter Winter* reports on mass arrests of followers of the “Church of Almighty God”**

Bitter Winter said it received the relevant information from representatives of the Church of Almighty God (全能神教会). According to this information, in Zhejiang Province at least 1,043 followers of the Church of Almighty God were placed under arrest on a single day, July 15, 2023; 408 of them were still in custody on August 8, and one person had died while in custody. In Jiangsu and Anhui Provinces, at least 2,100 church members were reported to have been arrested between January and July 2023. Members of the church were subjected to forced deprogramming and psychological and physical torture, and two of them died as a result of the measures, *Bitter Winter* said. According to an Anhui Province government employee’s confidential statement quoted by *Bitter Winter*, in 2023 the CCP issued a new secret document aimed at completely wiping out the Church of Almighty God (www.bitterwinter.org Aug. 11; Sept. 7).

The Church of Almighty God (formerly known as the “Doctrine of the Eastern Lightning”), founded in the 1990s, proclaims the Second Christ, a reincarnation of Christ in the form of a Chinese woman. It is banned in China as an “heretical doctrine” (邪教) and has been massively persecuted by the authorities since around the last ten years. *kwt*

September 1, 2023:

New administrative regulations for sites for religious activities come into force

The National Religious Affairs Administration issued the “Measures for the Administration of Sites for Religious Activities” (宗教活动场所管理办法, hereinafter referred to as “Measures”) with its Decree No. 19 of July 9, 2023. They contain official requirements for the establishment, administration and state supervision of sites for religious activities, i.e., temples, monasteries, mosques and churches. They thus affect the core of the collective religious practice of the five state-recognized religions. A draft of the “Measures” for soliciting opinions was already published on March 24, 2023. (A description of the draft can be found in *China heute* 2023, No. 1, pp. 4-5, in German). The final version contains only a few small changes compared to the draft.

On July 31, a text introducing the new legal norm in interview form appeared on the WeChat account of the CCP’s United Front Department. The key innovation stated in the text is that the new “Measures” – unlike the previous document, which only regulated the approval of the construction and registration of religious sites – include comprehensive regulation of all aspects: They also regulate the administration of religious personnel, religious activities, buildings and security, they contain regulations for the establishment of internal management mechanisms and supervision mechanisms. In doing so, according to the text, they support “the religious circles in the comprehensive and strict governance of religion” (text of the “Measures”: www.gov.cn/gongbao/2023/issue_10666/202308/content_6900867.html; English translation of *Bitter Winter*: <https://bitterwinter.org/the-new-chinese-measures-for-religious-activity-venues-come-into-force-on-september-1-the-full-text>; *Tongzhan xinyu* according to www.chinacatholic.cn July 31). *kwt*

Daoism

July 25–26, 2023:

First forum on Sinicization of Daoism meets in Shanghai

The Chinese Daoist Association (CDA), in cooperation with the Shanghai Daoist Association, the Shanghai City God Temple and the Mingdao Daoist Culture Research Institute of East China Normal University, co-organized the conference in Shanghai “Talking about the Dao by the Sea: The First Forum on the Theory and Practice of Sinicization of Daoism.” Chen Chang 陈昶, director of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, called for correcting the Daoist style, improving quality, training talents and standardizing administration as Daoism Sinicizes. Daoism must advance its modern transformation to keep up with the times, Chen said, according to a report on the Shanghai City God Temple’s WeChat account. According to *Bitter Winter*, representatives of dozens of leading Daoist temples from all over China attended the conference. The portal reported that participants were trained in workshops to conduct patriotic education in their temples. “Best practices” were also presented in which temples were “Sinicized” by eliminating divination and limiting the practices of incense offerings and the burning of paper. Temples were also instructed to curb the activities of independent vendors of religious items, *Bitter Winter* said; these items should be sold in only one single temple-managed shop in each venue.

According to Chen Chang, “Talking about the Dao by the Sea” (海上论道 – a pun on the place name “Shanghai”) is a “brand” of religious work in the city of Shanghai. On the Internet you can also find events from other religions in Shanghai under this motto, for example a forum on “humanistic Buddhism” organized by the Jade Buddha Temple on October 9/10, 2023 (bitterwinter.org Aug. 8; www.chinabuddhism.com.cn Oct. 10; Shanghai City God Temple WeChat account according to www.daoisms.com.cn/article/sort028/info-49242.html). *kwf*

September 24–25, 2023:

5th International Daoism Forum meets on Maoshan and founds World Federation of Daoism

The 5th International Daoism Forum (第五届国际道教论坛) was held on Maoshan in Jurong City, Jiangsu Province, from September 24 to 25, 2023. Over 500 people from 39 countries and territories took part in this big event. The forum was organized by the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA), the official umbrella organization of Daoism in China, and the China Religious Culture Communication Association. Co-organizers were the Hong Kong Daoist Association, the Macao Daoist Association and the Daoist Association Headquarters (Taiwan). At the final meeting, a “Maoshan Declaration” was adopted (text at www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=9339&p='p').

During the 5th International Daoism Forum, the World Federation of Daoism (世界道教联合会) was founded. Its founding members include 52 Daoist organizations from 20 states and territories. According to a report by state-run *Xinhua News Agency*, the World Federation of Daoism is “an international, professional, non-profit social organization voluntarily formed by Daoist organizations, Daoist temples, Daoism-related institutions and well-known personalities who believe in Daoism or love Daoist culture” with the purpose “to carry forward and develop the excellent traditional culture of Daoism, strengthen the cooperation of Daoist followers and organizations worldwide, promote the adaptation to the era and internationalization of Daoism, promote exchanges between civilizations of humanity and the peaceful development of the world.”

The new chairman of the board of the World Federation of Daoism is Li Guangfu 李光富, the president of the CDA. According to *Le Monde*, two of the six vice-chairs are foreigners: the Italian Vincenzo di Ieso (Li Xuanzong 李玄宗), president of the Chiesa Taoista d'Italia, and the Frenchman Hervé Louchouart Trestard (Jing Wei 景威), president of the Asociación Mexicana para el Desarrollo del Daoísmo A.C, both Daoist priests. The Daoist priest José Barreno, chairman of the Associação Daoista de Portugal, was elected Secretary General of the World Federation (subpage for the 5th International Daoism Forum: <http://121.42.248.217:8081/home>; *Le Monde* Oct. 8; www.facebook.com/daoismo [Associação Daoista de Portugal] Sept. 26). *kwt*

October 8, 2023:

Chinese Daoist Association CDA and Daoist Association of Russia (DAR) hold joint online course on Daoist culture

Almost 150 people interested in Daoism from various Russian cities took part in the 6-hour course. CDA Chairman Li Guangfu 李光富, Vice Chairmen Meng Zhiling 孟至岭 and Zhang Gaodeng 张高澄, and General Secretary Li Hanying 李寒颖 introduced various aspects of Daoist teachings and practices. The Chairman of the DAR, Aleksei Alekseevich Khokhlov, also spoke. According to the report on the CDA website, the two associations have maintained friendly relations for almost ten years. The DAR was founded in 2014 (www.taoist.org.cn Oct. 11; www.daoisms.com.cn July 15; Daoist Association of Russia website: www.daorussia.org/en). *kwt*

Buddhism

June 29, 2023:

Press briefing in Beijing: Tibetan Buddhism reincarnation system continues, approvals by central government, successors must be sought within China

The Beijing-based China Tibetology Research Center and the All-China Journalists Association held a press briefing on “New Xizang in the New Era with New Vitality” (The Chinese leadership has introduced the use of the Pinyin transcription of the Chinese name “Xizang” instead of “Tibet” in English texts). When asked by a journalist whether the “Living Buddha Reincarnation System” would continue, Zhang Yun of the China Tibetology Research Center said: In the course of the development of the reincarnation system of Tibetan Buddhism, the political influence of the [Chinese] central government has never been interrupted. The central government of the Qing basically determined the procedure for the reincarnation of Living Buddhas of Tibetan Buddhism, including Dalai and Panchen, namely that all of them should be approved by the central government, searched for within the country [*jingnei* 境内 – in today’s Chinese legal norms this means the PRC without Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan] and [confirmed] by drawing lots from the Golden Urn. He said that the reincarnation of Living Buddhas as a system for the healthy transmission of Tibetan Buddhism is a serious matter that the 14th Dalai Lama must also respect and cannot use or not use as he pleases.

The 14th Dalai Lama turned 88 on July 6. The Kashag (the cabinet of the Tibetan government-in-exile) stated in a position paper on September 29, 2022 that the 14th Dalai Lama would reach the age of 113 and that instructions on the question of his reincarnation would be entirely at his discretion. No government or person had the right to interfere. In 2011, the Dalai Lama said that when he was around 90

years old, he would discuss whether the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue to exist or not. In 1995, the Chinese government kidnapped the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama, recognized by the Dalai Lama, and installed its own 11th Panchen. The Panchen Lamas are considered the second highest spiritual authority of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama and play an important role in identifying his reincarnation. However, on February 22, 2023, China's *Global Times* stated that the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama "hold equal positions in Tibetan Buddhism." For the positioning of the "official" Panchen Lama, see the following entry (globaltimes.cn Feb. 22; June 29; www.tibetology.ac.cn/2023-07/13/content_42445624.htm; *China heute* 2012, No. 1, pp. 15-20 [2011 Dalai Lama Statement (in German)]; *RCTC* 2022, No. 4, p. 7 [regarding Kashag paper]). *kwt*

July 11/12, 2023:

Panchen Lama on Sinicization: Tibetan Buddhism must transform from "religion in China" to "Chinese religion"

The Chinese government-appointed 11th Panchen Lama spoke at the annual board meeting of the Tibet branch of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA). As the state news agency *China News Service* reported, he said: "Pushing forward the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism means that it must implement a profound transformation from a 'religion in China' to a 'Chinese religion.' It must gradually develop clear Chinese characteristics in religious doctrine and rules, administrative system, rites and customs, behavioral norms, etc., and become a religion that merges with the excellent traditional culture of China and is adapted to the socialist society." The Tibetan Buddhism will only have "the beautiful future of healthy development" if it adapts to the needs of the fatherland and people and follows the call of the times and civilization. Specifically, he suggested that efforts should be made to establish a "service center for the interpretation of the religious teachings of Tibetan Buddhism" in the Tibet branch of the CBA, where experts, scholars and a hundred senior monks would be concentrated to implement the project of the interpretation of the religious teachings (<https://chinanews.com.cn/gn/2023/07-12/10041810.shtml>). *kwt*

August 15–19, 2023:

Chinese delegation takes part in the International Buddhist Forum "Traditional Buddhism and Challenges of Modernity" in Ulan-Ude in the Republic of Buryatia

According to reports, 600 people from 13 countries attended the forum, including 80 foreign delegates. In addition to China and Russia, the report on the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) website speaks of delegates from Cambodia, Bhutan, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. But participants also came from India, for example the abbot of the Tibetan exile monastery Drepung Gomang. According to the organizers, the conference was aimed at participants from Buddhist-influenced countries. The Buryats are a Mongolian ethnic group, the majority of whom are followers of Buddhism in the Tibetan tradition. The forum was organized by the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia, the Government of the Republic of Buryatia of the Russian Federation and the Russian Foundation for the Promotion of Buddhist Education and Research. Russian President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov, among others, sent greetings. The six-member Chinese delegation was led by the abbot of the Lama Temple in Beijing, ethnic Mongolian Hu Xuefeng 胡雪峰, who is one of the vice-chairmen of the CBA. According to the CBA report, Buryat President Alexei Tsydenov expressed the hope to the Chinese delegation that exchanges and relations between Russia and China would be

further strengthened through “Buddhism as a bridge” (https://vk.com/wall-1142099_41688?lang=en; bitterwinter.org Sept. 12; www.chinabuddhism.com.cn Aug. 30; www.drepunggomang.org/news-events). *kwt*

August 16, 2023:

Meeting on the training and education of Tibetan Buddhist monks in Lhasa – new information about the Tibetan Buddhist Academy

During the meeting, which was also attended by the official 11th Panchen Lama, Vice Rector Wang Daocong 王道聰 spoke about the 12-year-old Tibetan Buddhist Academy (西藏佛學院) in Lhasa. According to Wang, 906 people who come from more than 400 monasteries of “the five major schools of Tibetan Buddhism” [i.e., including the Bön religion] are currently studying at the academy. There are 40 lecturers in Buddhism and 35 lecturers in general education, politics and law. An integrative concept is being pursued that does not unilaterally favor the direction of any one school, Wang said. Monks and nuns have been studying together since 2014, a pioneering achievement in the history of Tibetan Buddhist monastic learning, which meets the need of the majority of nuns to study the sutras. Lobsang, vice-general secretary of the Tibet branch of the CBA, reported that since the issuance of the “Preliminary Administrative Measures of the Tibet Autonomous Region for the Acquisition of Geshe Lharampa Degree by Tibetan Buddhist Monks” in 2003, to date 177 senior monks have received this degree [the highest scholarly degree in Tibetan Buddhism]. According to Lobsang, these monks now largely hold important positions in the monasteries, and some are also members of people’s congresses or political consultative conferences or boards of Buddhist associations at various levels. In recent years, it has been decided that 7 to 13 monks should take part in the Geshe Lharampa exam every year, including one monk from each of the Tashi Lhunpo, Galden Jampaling, Drepung, Sera and Ganden monasteries and two to six monks from other monasteries, said Lobsang. The *China News Service* report on the meeting also included the speech of the 11th Panchen, who, among others, held up the Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) as a role model for Living Buddhas and high-ranking monks (www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2023/08-16/10061916.shtml; see also *RCTC* 2022, No. 1, pp. 7-8 [10 years of the Tibetan Buddhist Academy]). *kwt*

September 10, 2023:

Authorities are trying to restrict huge influxes to 7th Gungthang Rinpoche’s Kalachakra teachings

Gungthang Rinpoche’s Kalachakra teaching took place from September 15 to 17, 2023 in the Zuogaimanma Township (Tibetan: Dzoghe Mema) in the City of Hezuo (Tibetan: Tsoe) in the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province. The authorities had approved the event. As *Radio Free Asia (RFA)*, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) and other media reported, thousands of Tibetan believers who wanted to attend the teaching camped near the site days before the Kalachakra began. A satellite image from September 13 analyzed by *RFA* showed an area of about 340 hectares covered with tents, according to the broadcaster, and an *RFA* source estimated the number of worshippers who had traveled to the area to receive a Kalachakra teaching at over 100,000. On September 10, according to *RFA*, the Zuogaimanma Township government issued a proclamation stating that the ritual was intended only for clergy and believers of Zuogaiduoma, the hometown of the 7th Gungthang Rinpoche. Worshipers from other places should go home to avoid traffic jams, people congestion and

chaos. According to ICT, thousands of Tibetan believers appear to have ignored the government order. Gungthang's Kalachakra teaching was originally supposed to take place in July, but was canceled at short notice by the authorities.

The Gungthang Rinpoche is the second highest reincarnation of Labrang Tashikhyil Monastery in Gansu Province. The 7th Gungthang Lobsang Geleg Tenpe Khenchen was born in 2002, so he is only 21 years old. His identification as a reincarnation of the 6th Gungthang took place in 2004 with the approval of the Chinese central government. As Tibetologist Martin Slobodník wrote on the occasion of the young Gungthang's enthronement in 2006, the 6th Gungthang Rinpoche Jogme Tenpe Wangchug (1926–2000) was a very influential lama. His Kalachakra teachings in the 1990s attracted huge crowds of over 100,000 Tibetans and contributed to the resurgence of Buddhism after the Cultural Revolution, Slobodník said. The popularity of his predecessor has apparently been transferred to the young 7th Gungthang (*RFA* July 17; Sept. 14; *savetibet.org* July 26; Sept. 19; M. Slobodník, "Enthronement of the 7th Gungthang Rinpoche," in: *China heute* 2006, No. 4-5, pp. 131-132 [in German]). *kwf*

October 25, 2023:

Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) celebrates 70th anniversary

The commemoration ceremony to mark the occasion took place in Beijing. On the same day, Wang Huning, chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, received CBA leaders. He urged the Buddhist leaders to study more deeply Xi Jinping's "Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era" and Xi's important remarks on religious work, and to unite Buddhist followers to contribute to the realization of the Chinese Dream.

According to a text distributed through the WeChat account of the CCP's United Front Department to mark the anniversary, the founding meeting of the CBA was held at the Guangji Temple in Beijing from May 30 to June 3, 1953. The article quotes Zhao Puchu 赵朴初 (1907–2000), who led the CBA from the 1950s until his death, as saying: "A national Buddhist body like this, initiated by Buddhists from all regions, nationalities and schools of thought in the country, supported and organized, had never happened before in the history of our country." The founding of the CBA shows the unity of the Buddhists of New China, their zeal for the spread of the Dharma and their common desire to contribute to the state and world peace – so the Zhao quote (*Xinhua* Oct. 25; *Tongzhan xinyu* according to *chinabuddhism.com.cn* Oct. 25). *kwf*

Islam

August 18, 2023:

Conference in Urumqi on the topic "Persisting in the orientation of Islam in Xinjiang towards Sinicization"

A *China News Service* report on the conference summarized statements from the 20 Islamic representatives and scholars who took part. Topics included in particular the development of a system for Koran studies with Chinese characteristics and the formula 伊儒会通 ("Integration of Islam and Confucianism") (*Zhongxinwang* July 30 according to www.zysy.org.cn/article/4E7PpduZgQl). For details see *China heute* 2023, No. 3, pp. 140-141 (in German). *kwf*

August 26, 2023:

Xi Jinping gives a key speech on Xinjiang policy in Urumqi and calls for a deeper Sinicization of Islam

According to the *Xinhua News Agency*, Xi said, among other things, that maintaining social stability is the top priority. “It is necessary to improve the mechanism for preventing and resolving major risks and hidden dangers, link the fight against terrorism and separatism with promoting legalization and normalization of stability work, and insist on combating both the symptoms and the root causes [...]. The Sinicization of Islam must be deepened and all types of illegal religious activities must be combated effectively. It is necessary to raise awareness of dangers [...] to consolidate the hard-won social stability,” Xi said (*Xinhua* Aug 26). *kwt*

Judaism

Mid-July to the end of August 2023:

Exhibit on the former Jewish presence in Tianjin

According to reports from the official *China Daily*, a photo exhibit entitled “Jews in Modern Tientsin” on the Jewish presence in Tianjin in the first half of the 20th century was held from mid-July to the end of August 2023. The maximum number of Jews in Tianjin – primarily Jewish refugees in the 1930s and 1940s – was around 3,500 people. The photo exhibition was curated by 70-year-old Anna Song, a retired journalist from *Tianjin Daily* who has been collecting photos and interviewing Jewish people around the world since 2001, according to the July 26 article in *China Daily*. Irit Ben-Abba, Israel’s ambassador to China, visited the exhibition. It is part of a larger exhibition that was shown in Jerusalem in 2010 and in Tel Aviv in 2011. All exhibits and photos are gifts to Israel from Jews formerly living in Tianjin and are part of the collection of the Diaspora Museum at Tel Aviv University, according to *China Daily*. Anna Song has published several articles on the subject in the past, including *The Jews in Tianjin* (犹太人在天津, Beijing 2004) (*China Daily* July 26). *kf*

Protestant Churches

September 11–23, 2023:

Visit to China by EKD and EMW

From September 15 to 23, OKR Ute Hedrich (Evangelical Church in Germany, EKD), Pastor Dr. Eckhard Zemmrich (Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany, EMW) and Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle; already from September 11) visited various religious organizations in the People’s Republic of China at the invitation of the China Christian Council. A detailed travel report can be found in *China heute* 2023, No. 3, pp. 146-147 (in German).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

September 11–23, 2023:

Conversations during EKD/EMW visit to China: Fewer theology students in China

Prof. Chen Yilu, director of studies at the National Theological Seminary in Nanjing, has recorded an increase in the number of doctoral students at the seminary, but at the same time describes a significant decline in the number of first-year students. Over half of the almost 20 doctoral students are aiming for a so-called “Doctor of Ministry” degree, the core of which is research work related to practical community work. Unlike ten years ago, many of the students have already completed another course of study and worked in another profession, or they have gained experience as ordained church employees and are continuing their studies to obtain a higher academic degree.

According to Pastor Dr. Wu Weiqing, president of the Beijing Christian Council and Seminary, the Theological Seminary in Beijing has lost many potential students to the National Seminary in Nanjing in recent years. The capacities there were systematically built up, thus Dr. Wu.

Pastor Dr. Wang Conglian, president of the Christian Council of Guangxi Province and director of the Bible school in Nanning, was able to keep the number of new enrollments for the basic theology course at the Bible school constant. This is thanks to the fact, he said, that the previous maximum age for starting studies has been raised. There are also offerings for people with a lower level of education who could live as predicates at the Bible school for a year and complete basic training.

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

September 11–23, 2023:

Conversations during EKD/EMW visit to China: Political training for church staff is increasing

Visiting the national China Christian Council in Shanghai, Pastor Kan Baoping, vice chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and President Wu Wei said they travel extensively around the country attending conferences and conducting training sessions. Reports on training courses for a correct understanding of the church order of Chinese Protestantism and Sinicization can also be found on the website of the China Christian Council. For example, Pastor Kan led a training course for church leadership in Changchun from June 27 to 30, see: <https://ccctspm.org/newsinfo/16481>.

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

September 17, 2023:

Conversation during the EKD/EMW visit to China: “Back to worship” campaign by the Chongwenmen Church in Beijing

During a conversation with the leadership team of the Chongwenmen Church in downtown Beijing and subsequent attendance at the evening service on September 17, Pastor Liu Cuimin and Pastor Li Peiying reported that the number of worshipers in their church was approximately half of the number before Corona. The main reason the female pastors cited was the departure of many small business owners and employees who moved to smaller cities or the countryside because they lost their jobs during Covid. A shift to online-formats and changing spiritual practices at home have also played a role. The congregation is running a campaign to encourage more people to take an active part in church life. Large banners hung in the church asking all believers to invite their friends and relatives to

attend the service. When looking after small groups and making home visits, full-time and volunteer staff emphasize the importance of communal worship and Sunday community. This means that new people will gradually come to the church again and will be particularly warmly welcomed there, they said. In July, Grace Zhi describes the sharp decline in church attendance after the Corona pandemic in *China Christian Daily* with examples from the provinces of Heilongjiang and Guangdong. Pastor Wu Wei, President of the China Christian Council, confirmed to the German EKD and EMW tour group on September 22 that the number of people attending church services in Protestant churches across the country had fallen by between 30 and 50 percent (www.chinachristiandaily.com/article/12982).

Isabel Friemann, *China InfoStelle*



Banner on the church promotes return to church attendance.
Photo: Isabel Friemann.

Catholic Church

July 19, 2023:

Chinese-born priest becomes new bishop of La Réunion

Bishop Pascal Chane-Teng, appointed by the Vatican on July 19, was born on July 4, 1971 in the city of Saint-Pierre, the third largest city on the French island of Réunion in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar, and belongs to the diocesan clergy of the diocese of Saint-Denis-de-La Réunion. His Chinese name is Zeng Qinghui 曾慶輝. His ancestors, ethnic Hakka Chinese, hail from Meizhou Prefecture in eastern Guangdong in Mainland China and came to the Indian Ocean region in the late 19th century. In 1923 they settled on La Réunion. The family continues to maintain contact with their home village. The previous Vicar General Chane-Teng has close ties to the local Chinese Catholic community, which consists of descendants of migrant workers primarily from Guangdong and Fujian. An estimated 25,000 residents of Réunion Island are of Chinese descent (they are called Sinwa in Creole). The first Chinese immigrants arrived on the island in the 1840s to work on the sugar cane plantations. Further waves of immigration followed into the 20th century. Chane-Teng was ordained in 2004 and studied in Rome before beginning his pastoral work at home. He succeeds 81-year-old Bishop Gilbert Aubry, who led the diocese for 47 years. He is also a member of the Theological and Pastoral Commission of the Episcopal Conference of the Indian Ocean (CEDOI), which includes the Comoros, Mauritius, Réunion, Mayotte and the Seychelles. In Réunion, he also coordinates the services for the Chinese New Year and for the deceased of Chinese origin. He also teaches Chinese folk religion at the university level (*AsiaNews* July 21; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/07/19/0516/01149.html> July 19). kf

September 7–15, 2023:

Chinese bishops' delegation visits Belgium, the Netherlands and France

The five-member delegation was sent to Europe by the Chinese Bishops' Conference and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association at the invitation of Cardinal Jozef De Kesel, chairman of the Verbiest Foundation in Leuven, Belgium. Members of the delegation included Guo Jincai 郭金才, Bishop of Chengde, Pei Junmin 裴军民, Bishop of Shenyang, and Cui Qingqi 崔庆琪, Bishop of Wuhan, all three vice-chairmen of the Bishops' Conference, Liu Xinhong 刘新红, Bishop of Anhui and vice-chairman of the Patriotic Association, as well the priest Fr. Ding Yang 丁杨 from the Diocese of Chongqing, deputy general secretary of the Bishops' Conference (he later took part in the World Synod of Bishops in Rome). Shortly before the start of the trip, Bishop Guo had been appointed rector of the National Seminary in Beijing. In Belgium, the bishops and the Verbiest Foundation discussed ways to reactivate their cultural exchange activities, particularly the Chinese-language training courses in Leuven for priests, religious and lay people from China. This was followed by a meeting with Cardinal De Kesel, Archbishop Emeritus of Mechelen-Brussels. In the diocese of Tournai, the bishops concelebrated at the solemn High Mass and took part in the Great Procession that has been taking place for 900 years. On the 10/11 of September they were in the Netherlands. There they first visited the mother house of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) and Sisters (SSpS and SSpSAP) in Steyl, where they also exchanged ideas with representatives of the China-Zentrum e.V. and Monumenta Serica Institute. They then had meetings with the Schraven Stichting in Broekhuizen and with Jan Hendriks, the Bishop of Haarlem-Amsterdam. From September 12 to 15, the delegation stayed in France, including with the Paris Missionaries (MEP) (*Agenzia Fides* Sept. 18; www.chinacatholic.cn Sept. 28; information from the China-Zentrum e.V.). *kwt*

September 8, 2023:

AsiaNews: Priest of Wenzhou Diocese convicted of fraud for refusing official registration

As *AsiaNews* reported, citing sources in China, Fr. Joseph Yang Xiaoming, born on November 22, 1989 in Longwan District of Wenzhou City (Zhejiang Province), was ordained a priest on December 18, 2020 by Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou. Bishop Shao has also refused to join the Patriotic Association and is not officially recognized as a bishop by the government. On May 11, 2021, the Longwan District Religious Affairs Office began taking action against Fr. Yang for failing to register with the Religious Affairs Office and other government-controlled bodies. He was charged and found guilty of “pretending to be a religious professional to carry out religious activities or unlawful activities such as obtaining money by fraud” [under Article 74 of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs”]. The Religious Affairs Office issued an administrative ruling requiring him to stop his activities, confiscate illegal profits amounting to RMB 28,473, and pay a fine of RMB 1,526.67. Fr. Yang appealed, saying that the accusation that he was a false priest violated legal principles and did not respect Canon Law since he was ordained by Bishop Shao. Fr. Yang is in possession of a certificate of ordination issued by Bishop Shao, and both the Religious Affairs Office and the government of Longwan District acknowledged the authenticity of the document in the process and did not dispute that Yang was ordained in accordance with Catholic Canon Law, according to *AsiaNews*. *AsiaNews* did not report how the case developed after Fr. Yang's appeal (*AsiaNews* Sept. 8). – Until now, the carrying out of priestly activities by Catholic underground priests has been prosecuted by the authorities as “illegal” rather than as “fraud.” On the other hand, there have been repeated court cases against unregistered pastors of Protestant house churches in which they were accused of fraud. *kwt*

Sino-Vatican Relations

August 31 to September 4, 2023:

Pope Francis is sending signals to China on his trip to Mongolia

On the outward flight to Mongolia, Pope Francis had already addressed China's head of state in a greeting telegram while flying over Chinese airspace – as is the custom. According to *Vatican News* on September 1, he greeted President Xi Jinping and the Chinese people: “Assuring you of my prayers for the wellbeing of the nation, I invoke upon all of you the divine blessings of unity and peace,” the short telegram continued. At the daily press conference at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said: “China noted the reports,” when asked by *Reuters* how China was responding to the pope's message. “The greetings from the Vatican embody friendship and goodwill. China and the Vatican have maintained communication in recent years. China would like to continue the constructive dialogue with the Vatican, enhance understanding, build up mutual trust and advance the process of improving the relations between the two sides.”

Pope Francis used the trip to send another greeting to the Chinese people. At the end of the Mass at the “Steppe Arena” in Ulaanbaatar on Sunday, September 3, the Pope took the hands of Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong Cardinal John Tong Hon and the current Bishop (now Cardinal) Stephen Chow Sau-yan SJ and, to repeated applause, said in Italian into the microphone: “These two bishop brothers, the Hereditary of Hong Kong and the current Bishop of Hong Kong: I would like to take advantage of their presence to send a warm greeting to the noble Chinese people. To all the people I wish the best, and to move forward, always progress. And I ask the Chinese Catholics to be good Christians and good citizens. To everybody.” On the same day, Pope Francis also met the Argentine ambassador residing in Beijing. The meeting with Gustavo Sabino Vaca Narvaja took place in the Apostolic Prefecture in Ulaanbaatar, where the Pope stayed during his visit to Mongolia. The Pope also had a comparatively long exchange with Bishop Chow at the personal meeting at the end of the meeting with bishops, priests, missionaries and consecrated persons, as well as pastoral workers, in the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral in Ulaanbaatar. The Bishop of Macau, Stephen Lee Bun-sang, was also on the papal visit.

At the “inflight press conference” on the return flight, as *Vatican News* writes on September 4, the Pope again “clearly courted Beijing's favor”: “The relationship with China is very respectful, very respectful. I personally have great admiration for the Chinese people. The channels are very open – for the appointment of bishops there is a commission that has been working with the Chinese government and the Vatican for a long time. Then there are many, or rather there are some, Catholic priests or Catholic intellectuals who are often invited to Chinese universities to offer courses. I think we need to move forward in the religious aspect to understand each other better and so that Chinese citizens do not think that the Church does not accept their culture and values and that the Church is dependent on another, foreign power. This friendly path is well-followed by the Commission chaired by Cardinal Parolin: they are doing a good job, even on the Chinese side, relations are moving forward. I have great respect for the Chinese people.”

According to *AsiaNews*, about 200 Chinese Catholics from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and the PRC were present at the Pope's visit to Mongolia. Before the trip, the Chinese bishops and believers were banned from traveling to Mongolia. The order, according to Gerard O'Connell in *America*, came from the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party. Nevertheless, a number of Catholics managed to be present for the Pope's visit (*America Magazine* Aug. 31; Sept. 3; *AsiaNews* Sept. 4; *Vatican News* Sept. 1, 4; www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/homilies/2023/documents/20230903-mongolia-omelia.html Sept. 3; www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202309/t20230901_11137081.html Sept. 1). *kf*

September 13–15, 2023:

Pope's peace representative, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, in Beijing

From September 13-15, Cardinal Zuppi was in Beijing to “encourage dialogue in the search for peace” on behalf of Pope Francis, according to *Vatican News* on September 14. The mission, which Francis himself has described as a “peace offensive” to reduce tensions in Ukraine, has already taken the Archbishop of Bologna and chairman of the Italian Bishops’ Conference to Kiev, Moscow and Washington between June and July. On September 14, a meeting with the Chinese Foreign Ministry’s Special Representative for Eurasian Affairs, Li Hui, took place in Beijing. The conversation, which took place in an “open and cordial atmosphere,” according to the Vatican’s statement from the previous evening, was dedicated to “the war in Ukraine and its dramatic consequences.” The need to “combine efforts to encourage dialogue and find paths that lead to peace” was emphasized. The issue of food safety was also addressed, “with the hope that the export of grain can soon be guaranteed, especially to the countries most at risk.” The trip of his special envoy Zuppi “represents another step of the mission desired by the Pope to sustain humanitarian initiatives and to seek paths that may lead to a just peace,” the Holy See Press Office announced on the eve of the trip of the cardinal, who had previously promoted the papal peace policy at the international “The YVCX>Audacity of Peace” meeting in Berlin, hosted by the St. Egidio Community.

Li Hui is tasked by the Chinese government with exploring paths to peace in Ukraine. In recent months he has been in Ukraine and Russia, but also at the EU headquarters in Brussels, as well as in Germany, France and Poland for talks about a political solution to the crisis, as the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in the run-up to the trip (*Vatican News* Sept. 14; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/09/12/0622/01360.html>). *kf*

October 4–29, 2023:

World Bishops’ Synod in the Vatican: Chinese bishops leave early

At the World Synod “For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission” in the Vatican from October 4-29, 2023 two bishops from mainland China took part, but after 12 days of participation travelled back to Beijing. The Holy See’s Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, Paolo Ruffini, confirmed on 16 October that the bishops returned to China due to “pastoral needs” in their dioceses. The departure apparently took place one day later. On 21 September, the Vatican had at a press conference on the eve of the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Sino-Vatican agreement on the appointment of bishops of 22 September 2018 surprisingly announced that two bishops from China would participate as official delegates at the upcoming World Synod: Bishop Anthony Yao Shun of Jining, Inner Mongolia, and Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang of Zhoucun, Shandong Province. Bishop Yang was, according to CNA, ordained bishop in 2010 with the approval of the Vatican and has been Bishop of Zhoucun since 2013. Bishop Yao Shun was consecrated on August 26, 2019 as the first bishop within the framework of the Sino-Vatican agreement. From the Chinese-speaking area the synod was also attended by the Taiwanese Bishop Norbert Pu of Chiayi and Cardinal Stephen Chow SJ, Bishop of Hong Kong.

An early departure from a synod already took place in 2018: Bishop Joseph Guo Jincai of Chengde and Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yan’an had taken part during the first half of the Youth Synod 2018 before they also left the synod prematurely. *The Pillar* wrote on 19 October with reference to Chinese Church sources that the Chinese government has granted Bishop Yao and Bishop Yang only for a short period of time permission to leave the country (*Catholic News Agency* Sept. 24, Oct. 16; *Domradio* Oct. 16; *The Pillar* Oct. 19). *kf*

Hong Kong

August 1–6, 2023:

300 young people from Hong Kong at World Youth Day in Lisbon

According to a report by *Fides*, more than 300 young people from the Diocese of Hong Kong wanted to take part in World Youth Day in Lisbon. The young people were organized into 14 groups from parishes, religious orders, schools and Church communities. From March to June they took part in four meetings and various preparation phases in Hong Kong. The program also included meditations on the Gospel, Eucharistic adoration and communal prayers. “Pope Francis has invited you, he has recommended you to go out of yourselves, to respond to the Lord’s call through mutual encounter and encouragement with young people from all over the world,” said Bishop Stephen Chow Sau-yan SJ of Hong Kong, according to the *Fides* report, during a solemn mass for the young people on July 2 at the Hong Kong Cathedral. On the way to World Youth Day in Lisbon, 17 of the young people spent a week in Hong Kong’s partner diocese of Essen. The partner dioceses of Essen and Hong Kong particularly cultivate exchanges between their young people (*Fides* July 12; www.bistum-essen.de/pressemenue/artikel/junger-visit-aus-dem-partnerbistum-hongkong July 21). *kf*

August 10 / 29, 2023:

Hong Kong police arrests Catholic activist, among others

Under the national security law that came into force in 2020, six men and four women were arrested in a raid on August 10, including prominent pro-democracy activist and former chair of the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission Bobo Yip. A statement from Hong Kong’s national security police confirmed the arrests and said the 10 arrested, aged between 26 and 43, were suspected of “conspiracy to collude with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security [...] and inciting riot.” This was in connection with the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, the same allegation and organization that led to the short-term arrest of the former Bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen, on May 11 last year. Cardinal Zen was fined 4,000 Hong Kong dollars at the end of November 2022 for failing to register the fund which was founded in 2019 to support people injured during demonstrations in Hong Kong, but was dissolved in October 2021. On August 29, 2023, two more people were arrested in connection with the Fund (*AsiaNews* Aug. 11; *Radio Free Asia* according to *LICAS* Aug. 11; *Radio Free Asia* Aug. 30; *The Pillar* according to *Hong Kong Free Press* Aug. 10). *kf*

August 23, 2023:

China.Table reports: Hong Kong confirms length of prison sentences

According to *China.Table*’s report on August 23, the Hong Kong High Court has ruled that prison sentences imposed under the national security law cannot be reduced. When describing the length of the sentence, the law would use binding formulations, the judges said, according to the *AFP* news agency (*China.Table* Aug. 23). *kf*

September 30, 2023:

Bishop Stephen Chow SJ becomes cardinal

At the consistory on September 30 in Rome, Pope Francis admitted Bishop Stephen Chow SJ of Hong Kong, among others, to the College of Cardinals. *Vatican News* already wrote on July 9: “[...] significant is the elevation of the Bishop of Hong Kong (China), Stephen Sau-yan Chow, to the Pope’s Senate. Chow, who like Francis is a member of the Jesuit Order, recently visited Beijing; improving the situation of Catholics in China is very important to the Vatican. [...]” Bishop Chow was ordained Bishop of the Diocese of Hong Kong on December 4, 2021. With Cardinals Chow, Joseph Zen and John Tong, there are now three cardinals in Hong Kong at the same time. However, Cardinal Zen and Cardinal Tong will no longer be able to take part in a papal election due to their age. A good tradition continues, as Zen’s predecessor Cardinal Wu had already received the honor of the cardinalate. In fact, the elevation of Bishop Chow to the status of cardinal is an expression of appreciation for the Diocese of Hong Kong, also in its function as a bridge Church to the Church on the Chinese mainland.

At a press briefing at the Vatican Press Office on September 28, two days before the elevation of the 21 new cardinals, Stephan Chow expressed his surprise at the appointment. He described Pope Francis as the “Pope of surprises.” He stressed the importance of the variety of places from which the new cardinals come (as he also mentioned Cardinal Giorgio Marengo in Mongolia), and the historical role of Hong Kong as a bridge between East and West and the Church as a bridge between the Church in China and the universal Church. At the same time, he expressed his joy at the participation of two bishops from Mainland China in the World Synod of Bishops in October 2023 in Rome, which he also attended in person (*Domradio* July 9; *Vatican News* July 9, Sept. 28). *kf*

October 3, 2023:

AsiaNews reports: Accreditation Council of Hong Kong gives green light to a Catholic University

The Caritas Institute of Higher Education (CIHE) meets the criteria to become a private university, *AsiaNews* reported on October 3. Now the government of Hong Kong must officially approve the new institution, which will be called Saint Francis University. Hong Kong’s Cardinal Stephen Chow has repeatedly publicly supported this project, which is promoted by the Diocese of Hong Kong. According to *Headline Daily*, a Chinese-language newspaper, CIHE, a post-secondary institution with a strong nursing programme, has already received the green light from the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications HKCAAVQ, said *AsiaNews*. For the CIHE, the final political hurdle is formal approval by the government under Chief Executive John Lee. “If this happens, Hong Kong would get a new private university, the third after Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HKSJU or SJU) and Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (HSUHK),” writes *AsiaNews*. According to *AsiaNews*, the then Bishop Francis Hsu had already pushed for such an institution in the 1970s. Today, CIHE, together with the Caritas Bianchi College of Careers, offers post-secondary courses in 35 different disciplines, ranging from social sciences to technology and economics, and includes around 2,500 students. “Cardinal Chow actively promoted the idea of a Catholic university in Hong Kong when he was the local superior of the Jesuits, before he became bishop,” thus *AsiaNews*. Initially, a completely new university complex in Fanling near the border with Mainland China was considered, but the authorities rejected this for urban planning reasons. According to *AsiaNews*, when Cardinal Chow became bishop, he revived the project and suggested that the CIHE be turned into a university (*AsiaNews* Oct. 3). *kf*

October 11, 2023:

Synod fathers should support the release of Hong Kong publisher Jimmy Lai

According to an October 11 report by the Chinese-language *Zhuixinbao* (*Chaser News*), which has been operating as an independent news portal out of London since 2022, Lai Chong En, son of 73-year-old *Apple Daily* founder Jimmy Lai (the newspaper was closed in 2021), together with American Catholic scientists, addressed the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican and asked the bishops to comment on the Jimmy Lai case. Jimmy Lai, a Catholic, has been detained in Hong Kong since 2020 under the national security law. Lai said his father was inspired by God to stay in Hong Kong after the national security law was introduced and was ultimately detained for that reason. He called on the Catholic Church to publicly demand his immediate release. His father is known for many things, Lai Chong En said: “He is a newspaper publisher, an entrepreneur, a defender of democracy, a prisoner of conscience, and in addition to all these things, my father has been a devout Catholic since 1997.” Lai describes his father as the living spirit of Catholicism: “He was willing to give up everything to stand up for his faith and defend his religious freedom” (*Zhuixinbao* Oct. 11). Cardinal Zen, Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, has also repeatedly called for the release of Jimmy Lai. *kf*

Macau

August 1–6, 2023:

Around 100 young people from Macau at World Youth Day

The young people from the diocesan youth pastoral ministries and from Portuguese-speaking parishes in Macau also visited the Marian shrine of Fatima in the run-up to World Youth Day. In addition to these two main groups, smaller groups from Macau took part in World Youth Day; from the Neocatechumenal Way and Opus Dei, as well as some students from Don Bosco College who participated together with the Hong Kong group (*AsiaNews* July 28). *kf*

October 6, 2023:

Larger number of students at Catholic schools

According to a report by *O'Clarim*, Macau's Catholic diocesan newspaper, Macau's 26 Catholic schools and colleges are attracting more and more students, according to Stephan Chan Teng Fong, Managing Director of the Diocesan Catholic Education Commission. In an in-depth interview, Chan discusses the values and mission of local Catholic schools, as well as the challenges they face. In recent years, the number of students enrolling in Catholic-oriented educational institutions has risen continuously. Only a small part of the student body is Catholic. In the 2022/2023 school year, Catholic schools and kindergartens accounted for 31,004 of the total 87,184 school children in Macau. Many of the teachers themselves graduated from Catholic schools and identify with the core values and beliefs, thus the report. In recent years there has also been an increase in baptisms among teachers. When asked how patriotic education was implemented in Macau's Catholic schools, Chan said that the Catholic schools, like other schools, also make use of the “Moral and Civic Education” textbook. The schools also taught students to raise the national flag and sing the National Anthem. “Catholic schools in Macau are private schools operating in the Macau S.A.R. under the law, so we have a responsibility to promote patriotic

education,” Chan said. The biggest challenge that Catholic schools also have to face are changes in family structures, such as dual-income and single-parent households, which could lead to students lacking parental support and companionship. Schools needed to pay more attention to the emotional side (*O’Clarim* Oct. 6). *kf*

Taiwan

October 5, 2023:

Taiwan’s Vatican ambassador: Better to avoid a war than stop one afterward

At a reception with diplomats accredited to the Vatican, Taiwan’s ambassador to the Holy See, Matthew Lee, said: “Taiwan will do whatever we can to remain on the road to peace.” “It is my firm belief that preventing a war beforehand is much more critical than stopping a war afterwards,” said the ambassador. The Vatican is the only country in Europe that maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Bishop Norbert Pu of Chiayi, Taiwan, who was in Rome as a delegate to the Bishops’ Synod on Synodality, told CNA during the reception that the Holy See’s diplomatic recognition of Taiwan is very important not only to Taiwanese Catholics but also to all of the Taiwanese people.

“Taiwan and the Holy See share warm and friendly relations which have been growing continuously for over 81 years,” said Ambassador Lee at the reception. “We are extremely proud of what we have been able to achieve together to contribute to the staunch promotion of peace, justice, evangelization, and humanitarian efforts around the globe.” The reception at the Taiwan Embassy was an early celebration of Taiwan’s National Day on October 10. On this day, Taiwan traditionally celebrates the start of the Wuchang Uprising in 1911, which led to the overthrow of the Chinese Empire and the establishment of the Republic of China. Only 14 states worldwide maintain full diplomatic relations with Taiwan (*LICAS/Catholic News Agency* Oct. 6). *kf*

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