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Published in:
Religions & Christianity in Today's China

2023

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Guggenmos, E-M. (2023). Symposium “Shaping the Outlook on Life - Education and Religion in Chinese Contexts”. *Religions & Christianity in Today's China*, XIII(3), 23-26.

Total number of authors:
1

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Symposium “Shaping the Outlook on Life – Education and Religion in Chinese Contexts”

Esther-Maria Guggenmos

On May 4, 2023, a symposium took place at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University, entitled “Shaping the Outlook on Life – Education and Religion in Chinese Contexts.” Convened by Esther-Maria Guggenmos with the support of Lennart Hamark and the Lund Mission Society, it brought together researchers from Sweden, Hong Kong, Paris, St. Augustin, and Barcelona and inspired them to go for future research exchange on this topic. In the course of the event, it became clear that questions at the intersection of religion and education are crucial for understanding current religious policies in Greater China today. At the same time, the approaches and designs we witness on the Mainland, in Hong Kong or Taiwan can also inspire in the European context.

In the course of the symposium, we brought historical and contemporary approaches into dialogue with each other. In this way, developmental trajectories became evident and current situations were contextualised and became understandable in relation to their sensitivities. The participants enriched each other’s knowledge on education, Chinese religions as a lived practice and as a concept, Christianity, mission history, Buddhism, and religious politics and this led to an extraordinary depth in our discussions that asks for future continuation.

Christian missionaries shaped public education regionally in the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and Republican China (1912–1949). “Religion and education” is an inextricably linked relationship when it comes to Christian missionaries, as mission often unfolds either in charity work or educational efforts. It is peculiar to the Chinese situation, that missionary efforts around 1900 and in the Republican Period go along with China being forced by colonial powers to open itself to trade and foreign influences and East Asia making huge efforts to pick up “Western” knowledge and translate it into their mother tongues. It is with these efforts of translation that “religion” as “*zongjiao*” 宗教 takes shape in the Chinese language repertoire. In Taiwan or on the Mainland today, public education is a state matter while religion falls into the realm of the private sphere. Our symposium aimed at shedding light on this complex transformation in Greater China and reflected upon the current situation from a historical perspective.

Ongoing developments in the politics of religion in Mainland China are shaped by an enforced alignment of religious organizations to political visions that have been coined

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by the term “*zhongguo hua*” 中國化, often translated as “Sinicization” and specified as “Chinafication” by Yang Fenggang (2020).¹ Two contributions elucidated the current situation, its political agenda, and led to a discussion on concrete challenges. **Fredrik Fällman** (Gothenburg University) analysed, based on an exact reading of political pronouncements, degrees of a politically forced cultural adaptation. **Simon Chow** (Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong) reflected upon the current socialist agenda of Sinicization from a historical perspective and elucidated in how far forms of indigenization, localization, and contextualization shaped the development of Chinese Christianity since its earliest times and are not only on the political agenda today, but are also key to making Christianity prosper in China.

While untangling the web of political sensitivities is crucial to a proper understanding of the relation between religion and education in Greater China, it is likewise important to unfold this topic against its historical background. Chinese missionaries have been active across China at the end of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century particularly in providing public education for the marginalized. **Zhicang Huang** (Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona) and **Anthony Hu** (Sankt Augustin) provided us with historical flashlights: Zhicang Huang elucidated the educational efforts of Dominican missionaries on Kulangsu Island, located next to Xiamen, that enabled young girls to gain an education and worked against foot binding practices. Anthony Hu enlarged on the efforts that Steyl Missionaries took to educate their missionaries as well as the pupils of their schools. While Zhicang Huang’s research represented selected results of her Ph.D.,² we are delighted that in this edition of *Religions & Christianity in Today’s China*, we learn more about the flourishing market for educational publications of the Steyl Missionaries, especially the various sources for learning Chinese published by the SVD during the Republican era. In both missionary efforts, religious views are expressed that go hand in hand with cultural values and worldviews. In the future, it would be very worth to screen through this religious and moral educational material and reconstruct the worldview that went along with it.

The intersection of religion and education can be elucidated upon from both sides. **Juliette Duléry** (IFRAE, Paris) concentrated on the educational efforts of charismatic Protestant communities on the basis of extensive field work on sinophone evangelical elites in the course of her Ph.D. research. Fascinating about Duléry’s research was not only the broad scope of the project, but also the neoliberal tactics she identified in the efforts of the communities to define alternative spaces of education in media, popular culture, and innovative business spaces to educate and shape a new Christian elite. The contribution of **Esther-Maria Guggenmos** (Lund University) shed light on the emergence of the school subject “Life Education” (*shengming jiaoyu* 生命教育) within the past twenty years across Greater China. In Taiwan, as well as in Mainland China, religious education was in past decades and is to this day not part of the school curriculum, as school education

1 Yang Fenggang: “Sinicization or Chinafication? Cultural Assimilation vs. Political Domestication of Christianity in China and Beyond,” in: Richard Madsen (ed.), *The Sinicization of Chinese Religions. From Above and Below*, Leiden: Brill 2021, pp. 16-43.

2 Zhicang Huang recently defended her Ph.D. in Barcelona with a remarkable thesis on Kulangsu Island: “Zhicang Huang: Kulangsu (1684–1903): Un Enclave entre Imperios,” doctoral thesis, Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona 2022.

is regarded as strictly secular. With the development of Life Education, we see in Taiwan religious thought displayed in textbooks and religious communities engaging in curricular development. In Hong Kong as well as Macao the situation is different: Religious education has been part of a colonial heritage and Life Education might complement existing comparable education, especially in the case of public schools. The new initiative offers creative spaces of action and religious communities jump in to reshape religious education. In Mainland China, it is the question of how Life Education is worked out in single provinces and how far religio-philosophical forms of life orientation enter into the curriculum beyond religion-specific information. While the implementation of Life Education is, therefore, happening simultaneously, the four settings are highly distinct in their involvement of religious agency.

The religious landscape with its challenges of sinification, Pentecostalism, missionary efforts, and a religious-educational divide was complemented by **Monika Gaenssbauer** (Stockholm University) through a reflection on Wang Weifan 汪維藩 (1927–2015) as a theologian, intellectual, and artist. Educated in Chinese literature and theology, Wang Weifan excelled in considering the realm of Chinese philosophy together with the Christian message. The contribution exemplified the depth with which Wang was able to express the Christian message in Chinese imagery but also highlighted the controversies that accompanied the development of the Protestant church of Mainland China with Wang as a leading figure.

In the future, topics at the intersection of religion and education in Greater China will shape research in Lund and lead to cooperation and concrete projects. This makes it possible to address in greater detail questions such as the development of Life Education that gain relevancy in exchange with ongoing European developments.

Program of the Symposium, May 4, 2023

The Contributions:

Esther-Maria Guggenmos | Lund

“Life Education in Contemporary Greater China – Are Religions Back as Players in Public Education?”

Simon Chow | Lutheran Theological Seminary | Hong Kong

“Sinicization of Christianity in Mainland China”

Fredrik Fällmann | Gothenburg

“Adaptation of Religion – A Tool for Control, Fostering or Something Else?”

Monika Gaenssbauer | Stockholm

“Wang Weifan (1927–2015) – Theologian, Intellectual, Artist” (Zoom-presentation)

Zhicang Huang | Barcelona

“Breaking Barriers: Women, Education, and Evangelization in Kulangsu International Settlement in the Twentieth Century”

Anthony Hu | Sankt Augustin

“Neo-Missionaries in the Republican China: A Study of Selected Training Materials Mostly in Bilingual Format for the Foreign Divine Word Missionaries in Shandong”

Juliette Duléry | IFRAE, Paris

“Taking over the Mountain of Education: Charismatic Protestant Communities and Youth in Taiwan”

With discussions on:

- Religion and Education in Greater China
- Religions in Contemporary China – Sinicization and the Current Situation in Hong Kong
- Theologians in the Intellectual Sphere of China
- Christian Missionaries and (Public) Education – Historical and Contemporary Perspectives.