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Statistics on Religions and Churches in the People's Republic of China – Update for the Year 2019

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber
Translated by Jacqueline Mulberge

This year's statistical update on religions in China focuses on recent results from the China Family Panel Studies. In addition, we present figures on the individual religions from 2019 or – as new figures are not available for each religion every year – from previous years.

1. News from the China Family Panel Studies – “How Many Protestants Are There Really in China?”

In an essay published in 2019, based on surveys conducted by the China Family Panel Studies in 2012, 2014 and 2016, the authors arrive at an estimated number of almost 40 million Protestant Christians in China.¹ Since their analysis probably contributed significantly to the very substantial correction and increase in the estimated number of Protestants in the China State Council's White Paper on freedom of religious belief published in 2018 (more on this later), it will be presented in detail below.

The “Statistical Update” in *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* has reported twice on the China Family Panel Studies (*Zhongguo jiating zhuizong diaocha* 中国家庭追踪调查, abbr.: CFPS). The endeavour is a “nationally representative, annual longitudinal survey,” which focuses on the “economic and non-economic well-being of the population.” It is financed by the Chinese government through Peking University. Since 2010, the Institute of Social Science Survey of Peking University has regularly surveyed a fixed panel of families and individuals in 25 of the 31 provinces, direct-controlled municipalities and autonomous regions of [Mainland] China, i.e. all except Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia and Hainan. The survey has a target sample size of 16,000 households.² Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan are not included in the survey.

In the panel surveys of 2012 and 2014 (hereafter: CFPS 2012 and CFPS 2014) there were already different question modules on religion.³ In the survey of 2016 (hereafter: CFPS 2016) the question about religion was asked again. Based on the results of CFPS

1 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 175.

2 See the self-presentation on the project website: www.issp.pku.edu.cn/cfps/en/about/introduction/index.htm (English) and www.issp.pku.edu.cn/cfps/index.htm (Chinese) and also Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, pp. 167-168.

3 See discussion of the results in Wenzel-Teuber 2015, pp. 21-28, and *idem* 2017, pp. 26-28.

2016 in combination with the results of the two older surveys CFPS 2012 and CFPS 2014, researchers Lu Yunfeng, Wu Yue and Zhang Chunni attempt to find an answer to the controversial, long-standing question: “How many Protestant Christians are there really in China?”⁴ According to their own account, their study was first presented in November 2017;⁵ here we refer to the version of their essay that appeared in the 2019, No. 1 issue of the journal *Kaifang shidai* 开放时代 (*Open Times*) in Guangzhou. All three researchers belong to the Department of Sociology of Peking University.

1.1 Questions on the Topic of Religion

In CFPS 2012 the first question of the religion module was: “To which religion do you belong?” 您属于什么宗教? Possible responses were: 1. Buddhism; 2. Daoism; 3. Islam; 4. Protestantism; 5. Catholicism; 6. No religion; 7. Other (please specify). CFPS 2014 formulated the first question as: “In what do you believe?” 您信什么? Possible responses were: 1. Buddha, Bodhisattva[s]; 2. Daoist gods and immortals 道教的神仙; 3. Allah 安拉; 4. The God of the Catholics 天主教的天主; 5. The God of the Protestants 基督教的上帝 [for mission historical reasons Catholics and Protestants in China use different names for “God”]; 6. Ancestors 祖先; 7. None of the above. A multiple answer was possible.⁶ As Lu and Zhang explain, CFPS 2014 did not, as in 2012, ask directly about religious affiliation but, since systematic identification with a religion is not very pronounced among the Chinese, it made the deities its focus, in order to come closer to the actual percentage of religious believers.⁷ The third round of questioning, CFPS 2016, returned to the 2012 manner of questions: “To which religion do you belong?” In addition, the frequency of religious practice – worship/prayer (*zuo libai* 做礼拜) for Protestants, Catholics and Muslims, as well as incense offerings or Buddha worship for the other religions – was also asked (unfortunately the exact formulation of the question and possible answers is not mentioned in the essay). This question on the frequency of religious practice was also addressed to those who had previously stated that they were not affiliated to any religion. Since the CFPS always survey approximately the same households and persons over the years, it is possible to observe how they react to changes in the questions.⁸

1.2 Open, Hidden, Nominal and Committed Believers

In order to get a better idea of the real number of Protestants in China, the researchers Lu, Wu and Zhang distinguish four types on the basis of the CFPS data: “open Protestants” (*gongkai de jidutu* 公开的基督徒) and “hidden Protestants” (*yinzang de jidutu* 隐藏的基督徒), “nominal Protestants” (*mingyi de jidutu* 名义的基督徒) and “committed [Chinese literally: ‘pious’] Protestants” (*qiancheng de jidutu* 虔诚的基督徒). Although the authors

4 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019.

5 *Ibid*, p. 175.

6 *Ibid*, p. 168.

7 Lu Yunfeng – Zhang Chunni 2016, pp. 38 and 46; cf. Wenzel-Teuber 2017, p. 27.

8 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 168.

make this distinction in full only for the Protestants, because that is what they focus on, they also give figures for the other religions which are of interest to us here.

1.2.1 “Open” Protestants and Adherents of Other Religions

With this expression the authors refer to those who openly indicated in the three rounds of questioning that they adhere to Protestantism (or one of the other religions) (CFPS 2012 and CFPS 2016) or believe in the “Protestant God” (or the subject of believe of one of the other religions) (CFPS 2014). They summarize the results in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Religious Belief among the Adult Population of China (%)

	2012	2014	2016
Buddhism	6.93	15.82	8.96
Daoism	0.33	0.74	0.45
Islam	0.38	0.38	0.50
Protestantism	1.78	2.05	2.06
Catholicism	0.35	0.32	0.46
Other	0.10	\	0.35
Ancestor veneration	\	5.85	\
Multiple beliefs	\	0.74	0.05
No religious faith	90.13	74.10	87.17
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
Sampling size	30,859	29,572	30,550

Note: The data for 2012, 2014 and 2016 are from the nationwide overall sample of CFPS, they are already weighted.

Source: Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 170, Table 1.

The researchers calculate the number of “open Protestants” from the percentage of 2.06% of CFPS 2016, based on the total population according to the 2015 micro-census and assuming that the distribution of faith among minors is the same as among adults. They conclude that “in 2016 the number of ‘open Protestants’ in China was 28.29 million.”⁹

Moreover, Lu Yunfeng pointed out as early as 2014 that the proportion of Buddhists and Muslims in the total population as determined by the CFPS surveys is probably too low, since Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia and Ningxia are excluded from the survey, and they are regions in which a particularly large number of Buddhists and Muslims live.¹⁰ Conversely, the fact that in these regions there are usually fewer Christians in percentage terms than in other parts of the country could increase the proportion of Christians in the data retrieved by CFPS.¹¹

9 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 170. According to the 2015 micro-census, the total population of the PR China was around 1,373.49 million; see *ibid.*, p. 178, note 23.

10 Lu Yunfeng 2014, pp. 12-14; cf. Wenzel-Teuber 2015, p. 22.

11 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 176.

1.2.2 “Hidden” Protestants – With a Glance at the Data on the Other Religions

In order to also “track down” those Protestants who may not be willing to openly identify themselves as Protestants in surveys (especially members of unregistered house churches), the researchers use the following two methods:

First, the question of the frequency of religious practice. In the CFPS 2016 survey, all participants were asked about their religious practice – even those who in the same survey stated that they did not belong to any religion. The researchers based their considerations on the assumption that “in general, Protestant Christians must attend worship services every week.” If a CFPS participant in the 2016 survey stated on the one hand that he had no religion and on the other hand admitted to attending worship services at least two or three times a month, the researchers assumed that he was a “hidden Protestant.” 87.17% of CFPS 2016 respondents said they did not belong to any religion, but 0.41% of those 87.17% said they attended a worship service at least two to three times a month or more. Based on the above premise, Lu, Wu and Zhang calculated a rate of 0.36% “hidden Protestants” among all respondents.¹²

Secondly, the change in questioning from CFPS 2014 to CFPS 2016. As Lu, Wu and Zhang write, it was assumed that while some Protestants might not want to openly declare their religious affiliation, hardly any Protestant would deny his faith in God. So they filtered out those who in 2016 had declared themselves to be without religion, but who in 2014 had stated their belief in the Protestant God. The researchers assumed that the people in this group – 0.49% of those surveyed in 2016 – were also “hidden Protestants.”¹³

Through the same method, suspected “hidden believers” of the other religions could be found. Of those who said in 2016 they had no religion, 7.21% said in 2014 they believed in Buddha or Bodhisattvas, 0.48% in Daoist gods and immortals, 0.03% in Allah and 0.08% in the Catholic God (see Table 2).¹⁴

Table 2: Change in the Responses of the CFPS’s Tracked Subjects in the Surveys of 2014 and 2016 (%)

2014	2016	Buddhism	Daoism	Islam	Protestantism	Catholicism
N / 0	N	79.96	86.69	87.14	86.68	87.09
Y	Y	4.54	0.07	0.28	1.21	0.18
Y	N	7.21	0.48	0.03	0.49	0.08
N / 0	Y	4.48	0.42	0.22	0.86	0.28
Y	R	3.82	12.34	12.33	10.76	12.37

Note: N stands for no religious belief, Y stands for belief in a specific religion (CFPS 2016) or in the deity of the corresponding religion (CFPS 2014), 0 stands for no response, R means that a different religion was named than the religion [whose deity was] chosen in 2014. The data come from the nationwide overall sample of CFPS with the overall sample of the year 2016 as a basis; they are already weighted.

Source: Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 173, Table 3.

12 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, pp. 171-172. However, the authors pointed out that among the “hidden Protestants” identified in this way there could also be Catholics, Orthodox or Mormons (*ibid.*)

13 *Ibid.*, p. 172.

14 *Ibid.*

To find the total number of “hidden Protestants,” the three researchers added the 0.36% “hidden Protestants” identified by their religious practice and the 0.49% “hidden Protestants” identified as a result of the change in the question, which (after deducting a few overlaps) resulted in a total of 0.85% of CFPS 2016 respondents. Extrapolated to the total population, they came to an estimated 11.67 million “hidden Protestants” in China.¹⁵

1.2.3 “Nominal” Protestants and Adherents of Other Religions

Lu, Wu and Zhang define as “nominal Protestants” those participants in the CFPS 2016 survey who had stated in at least one of the three rounds of questioning that they adhered to Protestantism (CFPS 2012, CFPS 2016) or believed in the Protestant God (CFPS 2014).¹⁶ The authors also give corresponding data for the four other major religions (see Table 3).

Table 3: Responses of the Tracked Subjects of CFPS 2016 to the Question about Their Faith in the Three Rounds of Questioning (%)

	Specified the faith in question at least once	Specified the same faith unchanged in all three surveys
Buddhism	17.7	1.89
Daoism	1.27	0.02
Islam	0.55	0.23
Protestantism	2.89	0.92
Catholicism	0.69	0.15

Note: The nationwide overall sample of CFPS 2016 was taken as a basis, the data are already weighted.

Source: Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 173, Table 4.

As Table 3 shows, 2.89% of the respondents surveyed declared a Protestant faith in at least one of the three rounds of questioning. From this percentage of 2.89%, Lu, Wu and Zhang extrapolate an estimated number of around 39.69 million “nominal Protestants” in China.¹⁷

1.2.4 “Committed Protestants” and the Phenomenon of “Faith without Practice” in All Five Religions

The three researchers regarded religious practice as the criterion for a “committed Protestant”: Those among the “nominal Protestants” who had also stated that they practised [i.e. participated in worship services] at least two or three times a month, were considered to be “committed Protestants.” They amounted to 1.54% of the interviewees, which, extrapolated to the total population, corresponds to 21.15 million people.¹⁸

¹⁵ Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 172.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

As Lu, Wu and Zhang report, the phenomenon “faith without practice” was found in all the religions. The CFPS 2016 survey showed that a large percentage of those who described themselves as belonging to a particular religion also stated that they never participated in religious activities. In Catholicism this phenomenon was the most pronounced: 45.1% of those who described themselves as Catholics stated that they never participated in religious activities. That was followed by Islam with 43.3%, Protestantism with 34.0%, Buddhism with 27.3% and Daoism with 23.3% self-declared adherents who stated that they never participated in religious activities. The authors suspected that in this group of people, religious identity might have been passed on by the family from one generation to the next and been taken over from the parents, while the respondents themselves no longer showed any commitment or participation. However, since the CFPS does not ask about the faith of the parents, proof is still pending, the authors say.¹⁹

1.3 So How Many Protestants Are There Really?

To provide an answer to this question, the authors present their results in the following table:

Table 4: Estimates of the Number of Protestants in China

	Method of Estimation	Percentage	Scale (Million)
Estimate 1	Open Protestants	2.06	28.29
Estimate 2	Hidden Protestants	0.85	11.67
Estimate 3	Nominal Protestants	2.89	39.69
Estimate 4	Committed Protestants	1.54	21.15
Estimate 5	Open + hidden Protestants	2.91	39.97

Source: Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 174, Table 5.

Estimate 1 – “open Protestants”: Those who were willing to openly declare their affiliation to Protestantism in CFPS 2016. In the opinion of the authors, these can be members of the “Three-Self Churches” as well as of the “house churches.”²⁰ The authors point out that also in many other, older studies the proportion of respondents who openly described themselves as Protestants was around 2%.²¹

19 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, pp. 173-174. – This assumption seems plausible, since a large number of Catholics comes from families that have been Catholic for generations and, in the case of Muslims, religious identity is also very strongly connected with ethnic-family origin, while – due to the rapid growth of congregations in recent decades – many Protestants are believers of the first or second generation.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 170. The authors refer, among others, to the surveys of the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS, 中国综合社会调查) (latest 2015: 2.13%); the World Value Service (WVS, 世界价值观调查) (latest 2012: 2.61%) and the household survey conducted in 2008/2009 and published in 2010 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences CASS (1.8%); see *ibid.*, p. 171, Figure 1, legend. At this point the authors also cite the estimate of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (PFRPL, Washington DC) (2011: 4.3%). On the CASS household survey, see Malek 2011, pp. 32-33 and 51-53, and Wenzel-Teuber 2012, pp. 30-32. On the PFRPL Christianity Report of 2011, see Wenzel-Teuber 2013, pp. 21; it estimated 4.3% (58.04 million) Protestants and 0.7% (9 million) Catholics in Mainland China.

Estimate 2 – “hidden Protestants”: Those who stated in CFPS 2016 that they did not belong to any religion but at the same time said they practiced regularly, or had stated in CFPS 2014 that they believed in the Protestant God. The authors suspect that they are very likely members of house churches.²²

Estimate 3 – “nominal Protestants”: These are the participants interviewed within CFPS 2016 who had answered the question about the Protestant faith positively in at least one of the three rounds of interviews.

Estimate 4 – “committed Protestants”: These are the participants who stated in CFPS 2016 that they adhered to Protestantism and practiced regularly.

Estimate 5 – addition of the “open” and “hidden” Protestants, that is of Estimates 1 and 2. The result is 2.9%; extrapolated 39.97 million.

Estimate 3 and Estimate 5 are almost identical. On the basis of these two estimates “we can say, although not with the greatest precision, that in 2016 there were about 40 million Protestants in China.”²³

1.4 “Figures Controversy,” Self-Declared Concern and Reception of the Study

Lu Yunfeng, Wu Yue and Zhang Chunni speak at the beginning of their essay about the “figures controversy” (*shuzi zhi zheng* 数字之争, this term is in my opinion an allusion to the [Chinese] “Rites Controversy” of the early China Mission of the Jesuits), which has long prevailed in China in terms of the number of Protestants and which they want to put on a scientific, rational basis. They quote the following figures: According to government figures, there were 700,000 Protestants in China in 1949 (0.17% of the then population). According to “Document No. 19” of the Central Committee of the CPC of 1982, there were 3 million Protestants and 3 million Catholics. According to the State Council’s White Paper on freedom of religious belief of 1997 there were 10 million Protestants. The website of the central government spoke of 16 million Protestants in 2005, and the White Paper on freedom of religious belief of 2018 (State Council 2018) gives the number of 38 million Protestants. The authors compare these official figures with foreign estimates that are several times higher: about 80 million Christians in David Aikman’s book *Jesus in Beijing. How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington 2003) or 83.5 million Protestant Christians in an estimate of the [evangelical missionary organization] Asia Harvest of 2010. The authors also mention – as an unproven rumour that is circulating abroad – that Ye Xiaowen, director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs at the time, is reported to have said in 2006 at two internal meetings in the Institute for World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) that there are 130 million Christians in China.²⁴

22 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 174.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166. – According to the authors, the alleged statement by Ye Xiaowen was first published in 2008 by X. [Bob] Fu in “China’s Persecution of Protestant Christians during the Approach of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games,” China Aid Association, 2008. It has been in circulation for ten years and is widely quoted, but there is no evidence of it and according to participants at the meetings, Ye did not say that, according to the authors; *ibid.* p. 166 with note 12. [A text by Bob Fu with this title can be found here: www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.

As reasons for these large differences in numbers, the authors mention first of all “differing statistical ranges”: They argue that government statistics were based on the figures reported by the “Three-Self Churches,” whereas foreign estimates try to include the independent house churches, and thus arrive at higher figures. According to the authors, different interests also play a role: Religious authorities prefer low numbers in order not to be seen as inefficient. Foreign missionary organizations in turn want to justify their work and hope for a Christianisation of China. The authors claim that the very high numbers of believers reported by some foreign organisations have led to an increased vigilance within China against the growth of Protestant Christianity. The authors point to representatives of the theory that an excessive growth of Protestantism in the countryside has destroyed the balance of China’s “religious ecology” (*zongjiao shengtai* 宗教生态). This theory regards Protestant Christianity as a “threat,” it is quite widespread in Mainland China, the authors write.²⁵

The results of the study on the number of Protestants in China, carried out by Lu Yunfeng, Wu Yue and Zhang Chunni on the basis of CFPS data, were widely received. As mentioned above, the authors stated that they had already presented their findings at a meeting in November 2017. In March 2018 Lu Yunfeng presented the study at the conference “Christianity in China. Impact, Interaction and Inculturation” at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, where according to a conference report he gave the number of 38 million Protestants,²⁶ and in October 2018 at the “Forum for Research into Christianity 2018” organised by the CASS.²⁷

The White Paper “China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief,” published by the State Council on 3 April 2018, also mentions the number of 38 million Protestants in China (State Council 2018) – which amounts to a doubling of the numbers officially reported by the state until then.²⁸ It is reasonable to assume that the White Paper adopted the findings of the CFPS study presented here. The authors Lu, Wu and Zhang indirectly support this assumption.²⁹ A report in *Fuyin shibao* (*Gospel Times*) states directly that the White Paper incorporated the estimate [presented by Lu Yunfeng].³⁰

gov/files/documents/hearings/2008/CECC%20Hearing%20Testimony%20-%20Xiqiu%20Bob%20Fu%20-%206.18.08.pdf. There it says that Ye Xiaowen had spoken of 130 million Christians, among them 20 million Catholics.]

- 25 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, pp. 166-167. In this section the authors quote from essays by various other scholars. – The founder of the theory of religious ecology is Mou Zhongjian, professor of religious studies at the Minzu University of China. Mou calls for the promotion of traditional folk beliefs and the sinicization of Christianity as a means of preventing the loss of the ecological balance of religions. He argues: “Western hostile forces are trying to christianize China, our countermeasure is the sinicization of Christianity.” See Mou Zhongjian 2012, esp. pp. 8-10. On Mou’s theory see also Mohseni Kabir Bäckström 2019.
- 26 Cf. the conference report by Monica Romano in *La Gregoriana* XXIII, No. 53, pp. 24-26, online at https://issuu.com/unigregoriana/docs/lagregoriana53-eng_web/24.
- 27 “Kan Baoping mushi: Bu yao jujiao yu neidi jidutu shuliang zhenglun, yao jieli jianzao jiankang jiaohui” 2018.
- 28 In recent years, up to 2018, state sources usually put the number of Protestant Christians in China at 23.05 million – this was the result of a household survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2008/2009 and published in 2010. See also Wenzel-Teuber 2018, p. 38.
- 29 They write: “If it is said that there is a connection between our research and the White Paper, then, from a chronological point of view, the reasonable assumption should be that our research results may have influenced the latter and not the other way round.” Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, pp. 175-176.
- 30 “Kan Baoping mushi: Bu yao jujiao yu neidi jidutu shuliang zhenglun, yao jieli jianzao jiankang jiaohui” 2018.

According to *The China Christian Daily*, at the above-mentioned CASS Forum on Christianity Studies 2018, some participants even spoke of a decline in the numbers of Protestant Christians. For example, a pastor from Shandong reported that in Shandong the number of Protestant Christians, at least in the “Three-Self Church,” was decreasing rather than increasing. As reasons for overestimates he cited the double counting of Protestants who had migrated from the countryside to the city, failure to remove the deceased from membership lists, baptised but not practising Christians and exaggeration of the figures due to social discrimination. According to *The China Christian Daily* the new figures from the CFPS survey triggered a debate among Chinese Protestants; many regarded them as manipulated by the government while some considered them worthwhile reflecting on.³¹

1.5 Our own Observations

In their essay, Lu Yunfeng, Wu Yue and Zhang Chunni several times give CFPS data on the other religions but without extrapolating it to the total population of China. In the following, the author of this “Statistical Update” (kwt) attempts to find out the number of believers of the other religions in China, by using the ratio indicated by Lu, Wu and Zhang for the Protestants of the percentage of people interviewed by CFPS to the total population on the CFPS percentage data of the other religions. Of course, this provisional procedure does not lay claim to scientific accuracy. The idea of this experiment is to get an indication of what the results of the CFPS might mean for the other religions and whether they appear plausible.

“Open” Religious Adherents (cf. Table 1)

“Open Protestants”: 2.06% of the CFPS 2016 sample, corresponding to 28.29 million people;

calculated analogously by kwt:

“Open” Buddhists: 8.96% of the sample, corresponding to 123.05 million people;

“Open” Daoists: 0.45% of the sample, corresponding to 6.18 million people;

“Open” Moslems: 0.5% of the sample, corresponding to 6.87 million people;

“Open” Catholics: 0.46% of the sample, corresponding to 6.32 million people.

“Nominal” Religious Adherents (cf. Table 3)

“Nominal Protestants”: 2.89% of the CFPS 2016 sample, corresponding to 39.69 million people;

calculated analogously by kwt:

“Nominal” Buddhists: 17.7% of the sample, corresponding to 243.08 million people;

“Nominal” Daoists: 1.27% of the sample, corresponding to 17.44 million people;

“Nominal” Muslims: 0.55% of the sample, corresponding to 7.55 million people;

“Nominal” Catholics: 0.69% of the sample, corresponding to 9.48 million people.

31 Zhang, Cindy – Ruth Wang 2019.

As shown above, the figure for Protestantism in the latest White Paper on freedom of religious belief (State Council 2018) corresponds to the number of “nominal Protestants” in the CFPS study by Lu, Wu and Zhang, or was probably even adopted from that study. There is no such correlation for the other religions. The number of “nominal” Buddhists alone, as calculated by analogy, exceeds by far the total number of 200 million for believers of all religions as stated in the White Paper. The extrapolated figure of 7.55 million “nominal” Muslims in China seems far too low – the White Paper speaks of over 20 million Muslims (corresponding to the population of the 10 ethnic groups considered to be Muslim). This is probably due to the fact that, as mentioned above, the areas of Xinjiang, Ningxia and Qinghai, which are dominated by Islamic ethnic groups, are not covered by the CFPS. For Catholicism, the White Paper’s figure of 6 million followers corresponds to the number of 6.32 million “open” Catholics calculated from the CFPS data – whereas, interestingly, the number of “nominal” Catholics of 9.48 million is close to the total number of 10 million Catholics (for official Church and underground Church combined) estimated by the Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Diocese of Hong Kong.

Whether Lu, Wu and Zhang did not extrapolate the number of adherents of the four other religions to the total population simply because they were mainly interested in Protestantism, or whether the data for the four other religions seemed less plausible to them, remains an open question.

Perhaps the results will become clearer in the future as those who design the CFPS survey continue to refine the religious belief question module. Lu, Wu and Zhang have already announced one change in their essay: the new CFPS 2018 questioning round again uses the question mode of CFPS 2014, “In what do you believe?”, but with the following modification: In 2014 different answers were provided for Protestants and Catholics – the “Protestant God” and the “Catholic God.” CFPS 2018 offered one clear answer for Chinese Christians of all denominations: “Yesu Jidu” 耶穌基督 (Jesus Christ).³² The result should be interesting.

2. Buddhism, Daoism and Folk Beliefs

“China has numerous Buddhist and Taoist believers, but it is difficult to accurately estimate their numbers as there are no set registration procedures which ordinary believers must follow as part of their religion. [...] China also has many folk beliefs which are closely linked to local cultures, traditions and customs, in which a large number of people participate” – according to the White Paper on freedom of religious belief (State Council 2018).

A certain orientation for this largest sector of religious life in China is provided by surveys. In addition to the CFPS discussed above, the 2007 Chinese Spiritual Life Survey (CSLS)³³ should be mentioned; it arrived at the following numbers:

32 Lu Yunfeng – Wu Yue – Zhang Chunni 2019, p. 177.

33 For the CSLS, from May to July 2007, a sample of 7,021 individuals aged 16 to 75 years was interviewed in 56 selected localities of different size as to their religious self-identification. In July 2010, Yang Fenggang from the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University (West Lafayette, USA) presented the results of the study in Beijing. For CSLS see also Wenzel-Teuber 2012, pp. 30-36.

- 185 million consider themselves Buddhists, i.e. 18% of the population above the age of 16.
- 17.3 million have taken the triple refuge (in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), i.e. have formalized their adherence to Buddhism through ritual.
- 12 million of the adult population clearly identify with Daoism.
- 173 million have exercised some Daoist practices or taken part in such, but these are difficult to distinguish from popular belief.



Xiahaimiao in the Hongkou district of Shanghai. It is registered as a Buddhist temple, but also houses a statue of the goddess Mazu, patron saint of seafarers, which is attributed to the popular religion. Photo: China-Zentrum Archives.

2.1 Buddhism

- 34,100 registered Buddhist sites for religious activities according to NRAA database 2020³⁴ (33,500 according to State Council 2018), of which:
 - 28,538 Han-Chinese Buddhism (28,000, State Council 2018)
 - 3,857 Tibetan Buddhism (3,800, State Council 2018)
 - 1,705 Theravada-Buddhism (1,700, State Council 2018)
- 222,000 Buddhist religious personnel (monks and nuns) recognized and registered with the authorities according to NRAA database 2020 (also State Council 2018), of whom:
 - 72,000 Han-Chinese Buddhism
 - 148,000 Tibetan Buddhism
 - 2,000 Theravada-Buddhism
- 41 Buddhist academies (State Council 2018)

34 NRAA database “Zongjiao huodong changsuo jiben xinxi” 宗教活动场所基本信息 (Basic Data on Sites for Religious Activities), www.sara.gov.cn/zjhdcjsjbx/index.jhtml, data retrieved on March 30, 2020. The figures are unchanged from the last access on February 27, 2018 (Wenzel-Teuber 2018, p. 34); in other words, the database has not been updated in the last two years. The results of a detailed search conducted on March 17, 2016 which also takes into consideration the distribution according to province is found in Wenzel-Teuber 2016, p. 27, Table 1.

2.2 Daoism

- 8,349 registered Daoist sites for religious activities according to NRAA database 2020 (9,000 according to State Council 2018), of which:
 - 4,011 Quanzhen tradition
 - 4,338 Zhengyi tradition
- ca. 40,000 Daoist religious personnel (State Council 2018)
- 10 Daoist academies (State Council 2018)

3. Islam

In the multi-ethnic state of the People’s Republic of China, ten ethnic groups are considered Muslim. In the statistics presented by Chinese authorities and academics their population numbers are generally equated with that of the Muslims in China. According to the census of 2010, approximately 23 million people belong to the 10 ethnic groups rated as Muslim, that is 1.74% of the total population,³⁵ distributed as follows:

Table 5: Muslim Population according to Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Population 2010 (Persons)	Percentage of the Total Muslim Population (%)
Hui	10,586,000	45.74
Uighur	10,069,000	43.51
Kasakh	1,462,600	6.32
Dongxiang	621,500	2.69
Kirghiz	186,700	less than 1
Salar	130,600	less than 1
Tajik	51,100	less than 1
Uzbek	10,600	less than 1
Bao’an	20,000	less than 1
Tatar	3,556	less than 1

Data: 2010 census. Table compiled according to Liu Xiaochun 2014, p. 71.

According to the White Paper (State Council 2018), “The 10 minority ethnic groups, the majority of whose population believe in Islam, total more than 20 million [...]” Furthermore, according to the White Paper, Islam in the People’s Republic of China has

- 35,000 sites for religious activities [mosques]
- 57,000 religious personnel
- 10 institutes for religious education [Qur’an institutes]

35 Liu Xiaochun 2014, pp. 70-71. – In 2014, Liu Xiaochun published an analysis of the population structure of the members of ethnic groups rated as Muslim, based on the data of the last, 6th, national population census in China of 2010. It was presented in Wenzel-Teuber 2016, pp. 30-34.

4. Protestantism

In point 1 above, the new results of the China Family Panel Studies on the number of Protestants in China have already been presented, which in all probability also influenced the new official figures on this. In the following, the figures from the working report of the official Protestant governing bodies, Chinese Christian Council and Three-Self Movement, at the 10th National Assembly of Chinese Protestantism in November 2018 (Gao Feng 2018) as well as from the White Paper on freedom of religious belief (State Council 2018) are listed:

- 38 million believers (Gao Feng 2018 and State Council 2018)
- 60,000 churches (Gao Feng 2018 and State Council 2018)
- 14,000 professional clerics (pastors, teachers, presbyters) and 22,000 preachers (Gao Feng 2018)
- 57,000 religious personnel (State Council 2018)
- 22 theological seminars (Gao Feng 2018);
(21 institutes for religious education according to State Council 2018)

There is a surprisingly large discrepancy between the work report of the Protestant bodies and the White Paper of the State Council with regard to the number of clergy / religious personnel.

For the higher estimates of the number of Protestants in China by various organisations outside China, see point 1.4 above and note 21.

5. Catholic Church

The following figures regarding the Catholic Church in Mainland China in 2019 are based on data from the Holy Spirit Study Centre (HSSC) of the Diocese of Hong Kong,³⁶ which specialises in studies on the Catholic Church in Mainland China. Account is also taken of the information provided by the official Catholic governing bodies, specifically their working report presented in 2016 to the 9th National Assembly of Representatives of the Chinese Catholic Church (Ma-PA-BiCo 2016), and the White Paper on freedom of religious belief (State Council 2018). Other important sources are the Catholic newspaper *Xinde* 信德 (*Faith*) (*xdb*), based in Shijiazhuang (Hebei Province), and its website www.chinacatholic.org (*xdo*, other Web address: www.xinde.org) and the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies (FICS) that works under the same roof.

5.1 General Data

Faithful

- ca. 10 million total number of Catholics, including both the official part of the Church and the Catholics in the underground, according to the estimate of the HSSC.

36 I thank the Holy Spirit Study Centre for making available its figures for the Catholic Church in Mainland China (as of the end of 2019) quoted in the following.

- over 6 million number of Catholics according to the official Catholic governing bodies (Ma-PA-BiCo 2016).
- 6 million number of Catholics according to state data (State Council 2018).
- 40,000–50,000 adult baptisms annually,³⁷ without the number of baptised infants (HSSC).

Dioceses

- 146 (115 Dioceses and 31 other administrative regions) (according to HSSC, corresponding to the Catholic hierarchy as of 1950)
- 96 according to the official Church (HSSC)
- 98 according to state data (State Council 2018)

Bishops

- 100 (78 in office) (HSSC), of whom
 - 69 bishops in the official Church (62 in office) (HSSC)
 - 31 bishops in the underground Church (16 in office) (HSSC)

In the previous year the HSSC gave the number of bishops in the official church as 64 and bishops in the underground as 36. Since September 8 (publicly announced on September 22) 2018 all Chinese bishops are recognized by the Pope. About 40 dioceses have no bishop.

Priests

- 4,950 in total (the number of priests who refuse [the state required] registration is unknown) (HSSC)

Seminaries and Seminarians

- 6 major seminaries (theological seminaries) with a total of 370 seminarians (HSSC)
- 6 underground seminaries with a total of approx. 100 seminarians (HSSC)

This means that of the original 10 major seminaries in the official Church of Mainland China, *de facto* only six are still working (the same information can also be found in *xdb* 2019, No. 25, July 9, 2019), even if government agencies (e.g. State Council 2018) continue to quote their number as nine. According to the HSSC, the underground seminars are under severe pressure.

Sisters

- 4,630 in total, of whom
 - 3,270 in the official Church, in 87 congregations (HSSC)
 - 1,360 in the underground Church, in 40 congregations (HSSC)

³⁷ The HSSC also states that the number of deaths is not counted; in other words, the number of baptisms does not mean that the Church is growing by the same number of believers.

Churches

More than 6,000 churches and oratories (Ma-PA-BiCo 2016 and State Council 2018)

5.2 Baptisms

For the first time in more than ten years, the FICS did not publish statistics in 2020 for baptisms in 2019. From 2008 on, it had published statistics on baptisms in the dioceses of Mainland China at Easter every year, and since 2017 it published baptism statistics for the entire year. The last available statistics state the number of 48,365 baptisms for the year 2018.³⁸

In a statistic dated August 31, 2019, the **Diocese of Hong Kong** stated that the number of baptisms in the year was 5,686. 795 of those baptized were up to one year old, 1,791 were between one and seven years old and 3,100 were over seven years old. The diocese estimated the number of Catholics among local Hong Kong residents at 403,000, plus some 183,000 Filipino and Filipina Catholics and an estimated 34,000 other Catholic foreigners living in Hong Kong.³⁹

5.3 Priestly Ordinations

48 deacons were ordained priests in Mainland China in 2019 (see Table 6). This was by far the lowest number in recent years; the decline in priestly vocations is now reflected in the number of ordinations. In 2018 there were 75 ordinations; 97 in 2017; 61 in 2016; 59 in 2015; 78 in 2014; 66 in 2013; and 78 in 2012. The number is doubtless incomplete; there were probably additional priestly ordinations in the underground Church.



New priest Wang Zhibin in Bameng with his parents and little sister. Photo: *xdo*.

38 Cf. Wenzel-Teuber 2019, p. 24.

39 "Statistics of the Diocese of Hong Kong 2019-8-31," <https://catholic.org.hk/en/香港教區教務統計-2>.



In Nanjing, Wang Jun’s mother robes her son in the chasuble, and on the left is the father. Photo: xdo.



Map: d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=27749&lang=de

Provinces, Direct-Controlled Municipalities and Autonomous Regions of China – Map and List of Abbreviations

AH Anhui, BJ Beijing, CQ Chongqing, FJ Fujian, GD Guangdong, GS Gansu, GX Guangxi, GZ Guizhou, Hain Hainan, HB Hubei, Heb Hebei, Hen Henan, HL Heilongjiang, HN Hunan, JL Jilin, JS Jiangsu, JX Jiangxi, LN Liaoning, NM Inner Mongolia, NX Ningxia, QH Qinghai, SC Sichuan, SD Shandong, SH Shanghai, SN Shaanxi, SX Shanxi, TJ Tianjin, XJ Xinjiang, XZ Tibet, YN Yunnan, ZJ Zhejiang.

Table 6: Priestly Ordinations in the Catholic Church in Mainland China in 2019

Province / Metropolis	Diocese	Number of Ordained	Date of Ordination	Ordaining Bishop*	Names of Those Ordained
BJ	Beijing	4	Aug. 24	Li Shan	Chen Julong 陈聚龙, Jia Nannan 贾男男, Pan Haijing 潘海静, Yan Xian'en 闫献恩
FJ	Minbei	1	Oct. 28	Zhan Silu (Mindong)	Zhang Qingsheng 张清生
	Mindong	1	Oct. 28	Zhan Silu	Chen Ming 陈铭
GS	Tianshui	1	Dec. 15	Han Jide (Pingliang)	Li Jiangan 李建刚
GD	Guangzhou	3	Nov. 30	Gan Junqiu	Huang Xiaokun 黄晓昆, Huo Tesi 霍特思, Zhang Shuanma 张拴(栓)马
	Meizhou	1	May 24	Liao Hongqing	Zheng Yongfeng 郑永烽
GX	Cath. Church of GX	2	May 3	Tan Yanquan	Yang Yi 杨艺, Zheng Lue 郑略 (both ethnic Zhuang)
GZ	Guiyang	3	Nov. 24	Xiao Zejiang	Liu Xueyang 刘学洋, Zhang Zihao 张梓浩, Zhao Jie 赵杰
Heb	Cangzhou	5	Jan. 25	Li Liangui	Dong Lichun 董立春, Jin Baode 金宝德, Wang Shengli 王胜利, Yang Wei 杨微(威), Yu Hailong 于海龙
	Handan	1	Feb. 22	Sun Jigen	Zhang Chongshuai 张宠帅
	Handan	5	May 31	Sun Jigen	Feng Gangyi 冯刚毅, Wang Yongle 王永乐, Wu Chong'ai 武宠爱, Zhang Chao 张超, Zhang Lifeng 张利锋
	Hengshui	3	March 25	Feng Xinmao	Duan Xiangyang 段向阳, Liu Xiangkuo 刘向阔, Wen Shengxing 温圣行
	Xingtai	2	Oct. 18	Ma Yinglin (Kunming)	Li Chunyu 李春雨, Xie Zhongchao 谢忠朝
NM	Zhaoxian	2	Aug. 22	Feng Xinmao (Hengshui)	Han Yanguang 韩彦光, Min Bohao 闵博豪
	Bameng	1	May 31	Du Jiang	Wang Zhibin 王治斌
JL	Xuzhou	2	Dec. 12	Wang Renlei	Ou Zhengfang 欧正方, Zhu Zhengdao 朱正道
	Jilin	2	Feb. 22	Pei Junmin (Shenyang)	Feng Zhao 冯昭, Meng Xiaoliang 孟晓亮
JS	Nanjing	1	May 11	Lu Xinping	Wang Jun 王俊
SC	Leshan	1	Sept. 30	Lei Shiyin	Lei Ke 雷科
	Yibin	1	Nov. 30	Luo Xuegang	Shi Wenlong 师文龙
SN	Sanyuan	2	April 25	Han Yingjin	Li Yunfeng 李云峰, Lin Pingjun 林平军
	Sanyuan	2	Dec. 3	Han Yingjin	Ma Bo 马博, Zong Xuefan 宗学凡
SX	Jinzhong	1	Oct. 22	not given	Chen Jianwei 陈建伟
ZJ	Hangzhou	1	Dec. 5	Cao Xiangde	Chang Zhenguo 蔡振国
Total		48			

* The diocese is named here only if the ordaining bishop is not the competent local ordinary of the diocese where the ordinations took place but was invited from another diocese to administer the ordination.

Sources (2019): chinacatholic.cn May 27; Oct. 8., 22; Dec. 14; chinacatholic.org April 26; June 1; Aug. 26; Dec. 2, 8, 18; knews.cc Feb. 22; xiaozhushou.org Nov. 26; Dec. 2; xinde.org Jan. 25; May 7, 14; June 3; Nov. 2; Dec. 4; http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_500cf6040102y8yn.html, accessed on April 1, 2020.

As the table shows, 8 of the 48 new priests of 2019 were not ordained by their local bishop, but by a bishop invited from another diocese. This number highlights the fact that many dioceses in China still have either no bishop or a bishop who cannot ordain (publicly) because he is working in the “underground.”

5.4 Bishops

Bishops Who Died in Mainland China in 2019

Jin Daoyuan 靳道远, Andrew (1929–2019), Changzhi (SX).

Li Side 李思德, Stephen (1926–2019), Tianjin.

Bishops Consecrated in Mainland China in 2019

Yao Shun 姚顺, Anthony (b. December 1965), bishop of Jining (NM), August 26.

Xu Hongwei 胥红伟, Stephen (b. January 16, 1975), co-adjutor bishop of Hanzhong (SN), August 28 [local ordinary from January 18, 2020].

Both ordinations had the agreement of the Pope and the civil authorities.



Bishop Stephen Xu Hongwei, one of the two bishops consecrated in 2019. Photo:xdo.

Partial Official Recognitions of Former Underground Bishops by the Authorities in 2019

Bishop Peter Jin Lugang 靳禄岗 of Nanyang (Henan), secretly consecrated as co-adjutor in 2007, appointed local ordinary by the Pope in 2010, on January 30, 2019 officially installed as co-adjutor bishop.

Bishop Peter Zhuang Jianjian 庄建坚 of Shantou (Guangdong), secretly consecrated bishop of Shantou in 2006, officially emeritus on January 22, 2019, i.e. recognized by the authorities as bishop emeritus. On December 12, 2018, Pope Francis had recognized Bishop Huang Bingzhang, who until then had been an illegitimate bishop from the ecclesial point of view, as the diocesan bishop of Shantou.

In both cases the Chinese authorities recognized the bishops concerned not in their original papally conferred function as diocesan bishops but only in subordinate functions (as co-adjutor bishop or bishop emeritus). In a third case the original (underground) Bishop of Mindong (Fujian), Guo Xijin 郭希锦, was at first willing at the request of the Pope to be downgraded as auxiliary bishop and to be recognized as such by the authorities. In mid-2019, however, due to the pressure of the authorities on his priests, he withdrew his application for recognition. At the end of 2019, according to the data of the HSSC, there were still 31 bishops in the underground Church appointed by the Pope (16 of them still in office) not recognized by the government.

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