

Asian Catholics in International Relations

Online Workshop

11-13 Nov. 2025



ISAC

Initiative for
the Study of
Asian Catholics

www.isac-research.org/internationalrelations2025

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the destabilization of the international order has become increasingly evident. Globalization appears to be stalling, and new geopolitical and ideological divisions are emerging. Among these shifts, the resurgence and transformation of Christian political ideologies—in both Russia and in the United States—are playing a prominent role in challenging the post-World War II liberal order. At the same time, one must note that key challengers to this international order—such as China and Russia—are shaped by political theologies distinct from Catholic traditions.

Historically, the Catholic Church had come to support the Westphalian and, later, the United Nations' systems of nation-states, and has actively reinforced the foundations of modern nation-states and international law. Over recent decades, however, the Catholic Church has also evolved into a truly global institution with highly heterogeneous actors. Non-territorial in many ways, the Holy See is a sovereign juridical actor that maintains bilateral diplomatic relations with nearly all countries worldwide and holds permanent observer status at the United Nations as well as in several other international organizations. Through the numerous institutions affiliated with the Catholic Church, the Vatican mobilizes various channels to engage in international diplomacy, peacebuilding efforts, and climate advocacy worldwide. Unsurprisingly, the Catholic Church has also been studied as a transnational actor, transcending sovereignties or claiming communities of normative action that contributes to global governance.

In Asia, the Holy See has developed a wide range of initiatives to concretely support nation-building processes and interreligious dialogues. Through apostolic journeys—Pope Francis visited 13 Asian countries—the Vatican also contributes to discussions on a broad spectrum of socio-political issues. In 2018, the Vatican and the People's Republic of China also signed a provisional agreement to clarify the process for appointing Catholic bishops in China and to facilitate potential collaboration between the two sovereign entities despite the absence of formal diplomatic ties. And global Catholic institutions headquartered in Rome, such as Caritas Internationalis and the Jesuit Refugee Service, are actively engaged in addressing the challenges arising from international migration in Asia.

As Catholics are present in nearly every country, it is important not to reduce the role of Catholicism in international relations solely to the formal diplomatic actions of the Holy See or to institutional collaborations. In various Asian contexts—such as South Korea, Hong Kong, former South Vietnam, and Taiwan—practicing Catholics have held high political office and played influential roles in shaping national and regional policies. These local Catholic actors contribute to international affairs in ways that reflect both their religious identity and their political responsibilities, highlighting the multifaceted presence of Catholicism in Asian politics beyond Vatican diplomacy and formal institutional engagement. At the same time, over the past fifteen years, the number of Asian cardinals has significantly increased, with several occupying major roles within the Vatican. During the 2025 conclave, some Asian cardinals were, for the first time, perceived as strong contenders for the papacy. Meanwhile, Pope Leo XIV is the second pope from the Americas—and the fourth in a row who is not Italian—highlighting the rapid internationalization of the Holy See.

Despite recent developments, the role of the Catholic Church in international relations—particularly within the Asian context—remains underexplored. Most research on the intersection of Catholicism and international relations has concentrated on the Vatican, the West, and institutional frameworks. In Asia, where Catholicism often constitutes a religious minority, many states place lower priority on diplomatic relations with the Holy See. This has contributed to an apparent distance between Catholicism and Asian international relations, reinforcing the relative lack of academic attention. This workshop seeks to challenge this historical perception by exploring the evolving dynamics of Asian Catholicism from various international relations perspectives. To deepen our understanding of Catholicism in global affairs, we invite contributions using Asia as a unit of analysis and a heuristic tool to examine the intersection between international relations and the Catholic Church through a workshop that is intentionally not Vatican-centric, not focused solely on the West, and not limited to formal papal diplomacy.

As Asia becomes an increasingly critical region for both global geopolitics and the future of the Catholic Church, this workshop will examine how Asian Catholics—both laypeople and ordained ministers—are contributing to and shaping international relations in Asia and beyond. We invite scholars in International Relations, Political Theory, Political Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, Religious Studies, Theology, and related fields to join the conversation by engaging with the following questions:

- How has the Holy See engaged with and contributed to international relations in response to Asian realities?
- How have specific Asian figures influenced the Vatican's international role?
- How have Asian political figures who identify as Catholic negotiated their religious identity in relation to their office, national politics, and international relations?
- How do the Vatican and Asian Catholics collaborate to support transnational campaigns to stop harmful climate activities, death penalty, and violation of universal human rights?
- What insights from Catholic social teaching and doctrine are invoked by Catholic organizations and individuals to address contemporary crises in Asia?
- How has the appointment of Asian cardinals transformed the ways in which the Catholic Church and Asia engage with international relations?
- How did the Holy See adjust its relations with the Japanese Empire before, during, and after World War II—and how did these shifts impact international relations during those critical periods?
- How have the centuries-long relations between Filipino populations and the Catholic Church contributed to international relations, and for instance, in shaping U.S.–Vatican engagement?
- What is the global significance of Sino–Vatican relations for international affairs?
- How has the trajectory of international affairs since the twentieth century influenced the Catholic Church's theological developments and her self-positioning within the international order?

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

DATE		TIME (Taiwan)	PANEL SESSION
11 Nov. 2025 (Tues)		20:00-20:15	WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS
		20:15 – 22:00	PANEL 1 – Asian National Consciousness & Catholic Diplomacy (3 papers)
12 Nov. 2025 (Wed)		20:00 – 22:00	PANEL 2 – Catholicism & the Sino-Japanese Questions during the Early 20th century (4 papers)
13 Nov. 2025 (Thur)		14:00 – 15:45	PANEL 3 - Catholicism & the contemporary rise of China (3 papers)
		20:00 – 15:00	PANEL 4 – Catholic Diplomacy on Asian Ground (4 papers)
		22:00 – 22:15	CONCLUDING REMARKS

For more information & registration, please visit:

<https://www.isac-research.org/internationalrelations2025>

TUESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2025

OPENING REMARKS

11 Nov. at 20:00 Taipei Time

- Chia-yu LIANG, National Chengchi University, Taiwan
- Michel CHAMBON, National University of Singapore

PANEL 1 –Asian National Consciousness & Catholic Diplomacy

11 Nov. from 20:15 to 22:00 Taipei Time

Chair: Michel Chambon, National University of Singapore

Discussant: Chia-yu LIANG, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

- **The Philippines, the US empire, and the Holy See in the Making of an American Concordat in the Taft Mission of 1902** by Jethro A. E. A. CALACDAY.
- **Vietnam's Fractured Soul: Can the Catholic Church Be Its Unifier?** by Hoang-Chuong NGUYEN.
- **Cardinal You and the Vatican's Role in Peacebuilding for the 2027 Seoul World Youth Day** by Jieun HAN.

WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2025

PANEL 2 – Catholicism & the Sino-Japanese Questions during the Early 20th century

From 20:00 to 22:00 Taipei Time

Chair: Thomas TU, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

Discussant: Saho MATSUMOTO, Nihon University, Japan

- **Faith Bridging Cultures: John C. H. Wu's Asian Catholic Perspective** by Emanuele ANGIOLA.
- **The Struggle for Diplomatic Recognition with the Holy See: Japan and the Chongqing Nationalist Government as Seen through Japanese Diplomatic Documents** by Hunglin YEH.
- **From Shimonoseki to Nagasaki, and beyond: Japan's Unexpected Centrality in Vatican Diplomacy on the international stage** by Olivier SIBRE.
- **Chinese Catholic International Engagement During the Second-Sino Japanese War** by Stephanie WONG.

THURSDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2025

PANEL 3 – Catholicism & the contemporary rise of China

From 14:00 to 16:00 Taipei Time

Chair: Chia-yu LIANG, National Chengchi University, Taiwan,

Discussant: Carsten VALA, Loyola University Maryland, USA

- **Safeguarding Peace in the Great Power Competition** by Enrico BELTRAMINI.
- **Asian Catholic Soft Power: Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle and Non-Territorial Diplomacy in the Sino–Vatican Interface** by Raymond PAAS.
- **Assessing the 2018 Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement and Its Implications on International Relations** by Chit Wai John MOK & CHAN Shun-hing.

PANEL 4 – Catholic Diplomacy on Asian Ground

From 20:00 to 22:00 Taipei Time

Chair: Bubbles B. ASOR, De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

Discussant: Alan Chong, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

- **From Cathedral to Istiqlal: “The Silaturahmi Tunnel” as a Symbol of Interfaith Diplomacy in Indonesia** by Hendrikus Paulus KAUNANG.
- **Care for Creation Across Borders and Faiths: Singaporean Catholic Responses to the Climate Crisis** by Claribel LOW.
- **Salesians in Higher Education in Papua New Guinea: A Catholic IR Perspective** by George THADATHIL.
- **The Catholic Church and Responding to Democratic Backsliding in the Philippines: Transnational Ties and Local Politics** by David BUCKLEY.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Thursday, 13 Nov. at 22:00 Taipei Time

- *Chia-yu LIANG, National Chengchi University, Taiwan*
- *Michel CHAMBON, National University of Singapore*

ABSTRACTS & BIO NOTES

TUESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2025

PANEL 1 –Asian National Consciousness & Catholic Diplomacy

11 Nov. from 20:15 to 22:00 Taipei Time

Chair: Michel Chambon, National University of Singapore

Discussant: Chia-yu LIANG, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

PAPERS :

A. Jethro A. E. A. CALACDAY:

The Philippines, the US empire, and the Holy See in the Making of an American Concordat in the Taft Mission of 1902

This presentation argues that the Taft Mission to the Vatican in 1902 was the moment of direct rapprochement of Rome and Washington that bound them in the common goal of establishing US colonial empire in the Philippines. The main object of the mission was the expulsion of the Spanish friars, a demand cloaked by the pretext of purchasing their haciendas. Despite repeated denial, the Taft Mission was from first to last a diplomatic errand. The American commission drafted a bilateral agreement in which the United States offered to the Holy See the swift and orderly resolution of various questions in exchange for its assent to withdraw the friars from the Philippines. The mission, therefore, was a negotiation towards a de facto US-Vatican concordat. The mission failed because of the Vatican's refusal to commit to the withdrawal of the friars in writing. In the absence of a signed concordat, the Holy See formalised its cooperation with the US by orienting its internal policies towards the new regime's goals.

Jethro A. E. A. Calacday recently obtained his PhD in history at the University of Cambridge. He is currently a fellow at the Ansari Institute for Global Engagement with Religion, University of Notre Dame, IN, USA, with concurrent affiliation at the Faculty of History, University of Cambridge.

B. Hoang-Chuong NGUYEN:

Vietnam's Fractured Soul: Can the Catholic Church Be Its Unifier?

This topic investigates the potential role of the Catholic Church in fostering national reconciliation between the Vietnamese people and the political leadership of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Drawing on historical, political, and theological perspectives, it seeks to answer a timely question: What could the Catholic Church do to create a space for reconciliation in a society still marked by deep ideological and historical divisions? This question raises three goals: first, it aims to identify the central fault lines within Vietnamese society – ideological polarization, the legacy of war and exile, political authoritarianism, and religious marginalization – that continue to fragment national unity and impede dialogue. Second, it seeks to critically analyze the concept of “national reconciliation” in the Vietnamese context, informed by both domestic historical experience and comparative theoretical insights. Finally, the research explores how the Catholic Church in Vietnam can act as “a third-party partner” in creating a safe, dialogical space that neither threatens state authority nor ignores the voice of marginalized communities. By emphasizing the Church's mediating role rooted in its theological mandate, social presence, and history of engagement in education, health, and civil society, it argues that the Church can contribute meaningfully to a broader project of reconciliation grounded in truth-telling, mutual respect, reestablish a right relationship, and the gradual

rebuilding of trust. This approach offers a vision of the Church not as a political actor but as a catalyst for healing in a post-conflict society, navigating its complex modern identity.

Hoang-Chuong Nguyen was born in Vietnam. At the age of 11, together with his mother and brother, they migrated to Richmond, Virginia to reunite with his father. He completed a Bachelor Degree in philosophy at Divine Word College Seminary in Epworth, IA. He graduated from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago with a Master of Art in Theology and Master of Divinity for priesthood ordination. Currently, he is a pastor of the Holy Trinity Catholic Church of the Archdiocese of Taipei in Taiwan, and also a doctoral candidate in the Fu Jen Catholic University of the Department of Religious Studies.

C. Jieun HAN:

Cardinal You and the Vatican's Role in Peacebuilding for the 2027 Seoul World Youth Day

Pope Leo XIV is scheduled to visit Korea for the 2027 Seoul World Youth Day from August 3 to 8. He's expected to present a vision of peace and hope to the younger generation, while offering reconciliation and healing to the divided Korean Peninsula. South Korean President Lee Jae-Myung proposed to Cardinal Lazarus You Heung-Sik, Prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Clergy, that the Vatican consider a papal visit to North Korea. The Korean Peninsula holds significant geopolitical importance, as the two Koreas remain the only divided countries on Earth. They are also located near Russia, which is at war with Ukraine, and China, which is at odds with the West. Korea's pursuit of peace, despite ongoing division, is expected to send a powerful message emphasizing the value of dialogue and cooperation. This message will resonate not only with North Korea, but with other regions entangled in geopolitical tensions and conflict. Against this backdrop, the role of Korean Cardinal You, as a key mediator for the Vatican, is more crucial than ever. This paper therefore seeks to explore the possibilities Cardinal You can create to foster peace and hope on the Korean Peninsula in preparation for World Youth Day, with a particular focus on the Vatican's role in international diplomacy. It also examines how his leadership can prove instrumental in promoting a peaceful future for the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

*Jieun Han is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for East Asian Studies at Sogang University in Korea. Her research interests include the Korean Diaspora, Marianism, missionaries, and the Korean War. Her recent publications are: "Evangelization and Indigenous Communities in Korea, 7th Century to 16th Century," in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Catholic Church in East Asia*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2025).; "Bishop Patrick Byrne and the Korean Catholic Church in Cold War Korea," *Korea Journal*, (Winter 2020).; and *An Chunggŭn: His Life and Thought in His Own Words*, with Franklin Rausch, (Brill, 2020).*

Discussant: Chia-Yu Liang is an assistant professor in Asia-Pacific studies at the National Chengchi University (Taiwan). He obtained his doctorate in International Relations at the University of Sussex (UK), with his doctoral thesis examining the discursive revival of tianxia (All-under-Heaven) in modern China. His research interests include Comparative Political Theology, Non-Western International Relations Theories, and Global Intellectual History. He has published book chapters on Sino-Christian Theology and journal articles on the Sino-Taiwan conflicts and Chinese nationalism from the perspective of political theology.

PANEL 2 – Catholicism & the Sino-Japanese Questions during the Early 20th century

From 20:00 to 22:00 Taipei Time

Chair: Thomas TU, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

Discussant: Saho MATSUMOTO, Nihon University, Japan

Papers:

A. Emanuele ANGIOLA:

Faith Bridging Cultures: John C. H. Wu's Asian Catholic Perspective

John C. H. Wu (吳經熊 1899–1986), a Chinese intellectual, convert to Catholicism, and former ambassador to the Holy See, exemplifies the role of Asian Catholics in fostering understanding between diverse cultures and contributing to international relations beyond formal diplomacy. Deeply rooted in Chinese philosophical traditions and profoundly transformed by his encounter with Catholic faith, Wu cultivated a vision of dialogue that transcended political boundaries. His personal and intellectual journey offers valuable insights into how religious identity can inform and inspire cross-cultural engagement in the global arena.

This paper situates Wu within the broader discussion of Asian Catholicism's contribution to international relations, as framed by the interplay of faith and multiple cultural identities. Through an analysis of Wu's autobiographical reflections and comparative writings, the study explores how he interpreted Eastern traditions through the lens of Catholic spirituality, and how he articulated Christian principles in ways that resonated with non-Western sensibilities. Wu's approach reveals a model of intercultural encounter grounded not in the erasure of difference, but in its respectful integration.

By presenting Wu as a case study, this paper argues that Asian Catholic voices—especially those shaped by lived experience across cultural frontiers—can play a transformative role in building bridges of peace, understanding, and cooperation. In an era marked by geopolitical tensions and ideological divisions, Wu's example illustrates the enduring potential of faith-informed cultural dialogue as a catalyst for a more inclusive and harmonious international order.

Emanuele Angiola (安吉恩) is an Italian missionary priest of the Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo (FSCB), based in Taiwan since 2011. He earned his Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Fu Jen Catholic University, Taipei, under the supervision of Fr. Paulin Batairwa Kubuya, exploring the thought of John C. H. Wu and the dialogue between Christian faith and cultures. He also holds degrees in Philosophy and Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Lateran University and a Master's in Vocal Performance. Ordained in 2012, he served as a parish priest in New Taipei City and taught at the Taiwan Catholic Regional Seminary. He currently teaches at Fu Jen Catholic University and the Fu Jen Faculty of Theology of St. Robert Bellarmine.

B. Hunglin YEH:

The Struggle for Diplomatic Recognition with the Holy See: Japan and the Chongqing Nationalist Government as Seen through Japanese Diplomatic Documents

During the Second World War, the Holy See uniquely maintained diplomatic relations with both the Nationalist Government of the Republic of China in Chongqing and imperial Japan, two adversaries locked in prolonged conflict. The rationale for this anomalous arrangement has

received little attention in Taiwanese scholarship. This study examines primary sources—including the archives of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japanese Diplomatic Documents, and the Republic of China's foreign affairs records preserved at the Academia Historica—to analyze the motives driving both Japan and Chongqing in cultivating ties with the Vatican.

For Japan, diplomacy with the Holy See served two principal purposes: stabilizing Catholic communities in its occupied territories in Southeast Asia, and protecting the interests of Japanese nationals residing in Catholic-majority countries of Latin America. Although Tokyo opposed the Vatican's recognition of the Chongqing government, the Holy See, guided by its principles of neutrality and diplomatic equivalence, argued that once it had recognized Japan, it could not deny Chongqing's request for formal relations. Japan, seeking to prevent this outcome, enlisted Italy's support to impose technical delays on the appointment of Chongqing's envoy, thereby attempting to preserve the appearance of exclusive Vatican–Japanese relations. These measures ultimately proved temporary. In January 1943, Xie Shoukang assumed office in the Vatican as the Republic of China's first ambassador to the Holy See, marking the official establishment of diplomatic ties between Chongqing and the Vatican.

Hung-lin Yeh is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at China University of Science and Technology and a researcher specializing in international relations, with a focus on East Asian geopolitics, China's foreign policy, and Japan-China interactions. Holding a Ph.D. in Political Science from National Taiwan University, his work explores regional integration, security dynamics, and historical perspectives, published in journals like Issues & Studies and books such as Local Autonomy and Local Regeneration. Yeh serves as Deputy Executive Director at Taipei City Education Foundation, Secretary-General of Taiwan-US-Japan Civil Exchange Association, and Alternate Supervisor at TAIUNA, contributing to policy and academic discourse.

C. Olivier SIBRE:

From Shimonoseki to Nagasaki, and beyond: Japan's Unexpected Centrality in Vatican Diplomacy on the international stage

Since the beginning of the Meiji era, the Catholic minority in Japan has remained the most marginal in Asia. Nevertheless, from the pontificate of Leo XIII onward, Japan acquired a disproportionately prominent place in the diplomacy of the Holy See. Rome, convinced of the imminent conversion of modern Japan—much as General Douglas MacArthur was in 1945—saw the country as a potential gateway for Catholic influence across Asia. A handful of Japanese lay and clerical figures played a meaningful role in shaping the Vatican's stance toward Japan and, indirectly, its response to the regional and international reconfigurations in which imperial Japan participated, from the Treaty of Shimonoseki to the capitulation in 1945. The export of Japan's politico-religious order also extended the influence of the Japanese Catholic clergy into occupied territories. After the war, Hiroshima—and above all Nagasaki, where the country's largest parish, Urakami, was annihilated by the atomic bomb—became central to Vatican reflection. Other postwar issues, including prisoners of war, the repatriation of Japanese citizens, and the trials of war criminals in Tokyo, likewise left a lasting mark on papal diplomacy and on the reconstruction of the Catholic Church in Japan.

In the following decades, this legacy continued to shape both relations between the Holy See and Japan and the Vatican's broader international positions, particularly on nuclear deterrence and humanitarian action, while also influencing internal conciliar debates. Throughout this period, Japanese Catholic elites intersected with their Chinese counterparts, situating Japan within wider Catholic strategies in East Asia.

Olivier Sibre, agrégé in history, has been Director of Studies and Research at the Institut Georges Pompidou since 2018. He is the author of *The Holy See and the Far East (China, Korea, Japan) from Leo XIII to Pius XII* (École Française de Rome, 2012). His research focuses on international relations, religion, politics, war, peace, and reconstruction, with particular emphasis on the global activities and diplomacy of the Holy See, especially in the Asia-Pacific. He also works on postwar French and European history. He is affiliated with the SIRICE laboratory and member of ANR GLOBALVAT

D. Stephanie WONG:

Chinese Catholic International Engagement During the Second-Sino Japanese War

This paper offers a historical survey of Chinese Catholic international engagement during the Second Sino-Japanese War, noting the ways that Chinese Catholic politicians and clergy sought to both rally a wider global sympathy for the Republic of China and respond to Japanese Catholic interpretations of the conflict. To begin with, it surveys political overtures which Chinese Catholics issued beyond the Church to the international community, such as appeals to third-party countries and to the League of Nations. At the same time, it highlights some intra-ecclesial volleys which Chinese Catholics exchanged with the Catholics in Japan, as Catholics from both countries debated the war in light of Church teachings on just war and peace.

Stephanie M. Wong (Asst. Prof of Theology and Religious Studies, Villanova University) is a scholar of Chinese religions, especially Chinese Catholicism. She teaches courses in the comparative study of Christian, Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought and practices, and researches the theological development and interreligious relations of these communities especially during the dramatic political and social developments of the 20th century. She has a forthcoming book about the pro-indigenization efforts of Vincent Lebbe and a coalition of Chinese Catholic leaders in politics, media, and education in the early Republic, called 'Making Catholicism Chinese: The Catholic Church in Modernizing China' forthcoming with Oxford U Press, January 2026.

Discussant: Saho MATSUMOTO is professor at the college of International Relations, Nihon University, Japan. She obtained her PhD from the University of Warwick, UK, and her PhD thesis was published as *Britain and the Papacy in the Age of Revolutions*, in 2003 by the Royal Historical Society. Since then, she has written extensively on the history and current affairs of Vatican diplomacy and Catholicism worldwide. She was one of contributors to the edited volume *The Vatican and Permanent Neutrality*, (2024), and is currently undertaking research in the Vatican's newly opened historical documents, Archivio Vaticano Apostolico, on the Vatican and Japan in the modern era, including Japan's former colonies.

PANEL 3 – Catholicism & the contemporary rise of China

From 14:00 to 16:00 Taipei Time

Chair: Chia-yu LIANG, National Chengchi University, Taiwan,

Discussant: Carsten VALA, Loyola University Maryland, USA

Papers:

A. Enrico BELTRAMINI:

Safeguarding Peace in the Great Power Competition

In this paper, I observe that for many Catholics, the way they understand global affairs is also shifting: where once globalization and cooperation seemed to dominate, today the realities of great-power competition are impossible to ignore. This changing landscape—where economic interdependence gives way to rivalries among powerful nations—raises pressing questions for believers. What does it mean for Christians to safeguard peace in a world where rising powers, such as China, increasingly challenge—even militarily—the dominance of the United States? I suggest that individual Catholics can only accept China’s rise as a global power if it unfolds through peaceful and non-violent means. While Christian faith rejects the use of force, believers may still recognize China’s aspirations to claim its place as a rising Asian power, provided these ambitions are pursued through dialogue, cooperation, and respect for international norms.

Enrico Beltrami, PhD, specializes in Catholicism in South Asia and the international relations (IR) of the Catholic Church in the Indo-Pacific region. His most recent article on IR is “The Church of the Periphery and the Catholic Pivot to the Indo-Pacific,” Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Vol. 7, no. 3 (2024), 124-138. Beltrami is the author of more than 70 academic articles and 5 monographs. He serves as professor of theology (retired) at Notre Dame de Namur University, California.

B. Raymond PAAS:

Asian Catholic Soft Power: Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle and Non-Territorial Diplomacy in the Sino–Vatican Interface.

This paper offers a human-centered case study of Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle to illuminate how Asian Catholic actors shape international relations not through embassies or fleets but through institutions, relationships, and practices that cross borders. As a cardinal-bishop and senior leader in the Dicastery for Evangelization’s Section for the First Evangelization and New Particular Churches—holding the suburbicarian title of Albano since May 2025—Tagle embodies the Holy See’s non-territorial yet consequential presence in the Indo-Pacific. The argument is that a dialogue-first ecclesiology can generate soft-power effects in a region defined by strategic rivalry, climate risk, and migration: decisions about governance of new particular churches, leadership formation, and mission priorities ripple outward into classrooms, relief corridors, and neighborhood councils. Empirically, the paper traces how missionary governance, catechetical and university networks, and Caritas-linked humanitarian initiatives collaborate with states and civil society on migration support, disaster response, and interreligious dialogue—opening channels of cooperation that states often struggle to build on their own. While the study does not claim Tagle has mediated particular South China Sea incidents, it shows how his role and public stance—especially regarding Sino–Vatican engagement on episcopal appointments—helps shape the background conditions in which regional diplomacy unfolds. By foregrounding an Asian cardinal’s curial leadership and the practice-based networks it enables, the paper reframes Catholic influence as relational, infrastructural, and locally embedded. It concludes that such non-territorial power can stabilize

expectations, widen agendas for cooperation, and lower the temperature of conflict—without adjudicating sovereignty or altering hard-power balances.

Raymond Paas, MgrMS - Master's in International Relations and Student at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland - was born and educated in Catholic schools in the Philippines and hold a Bachelor's degree from the University of the City of Manila. After a decade in the United States, I completed a Master's in Mediterranean Studies and am currently pursuing a Master's in International Relations at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland. I plan to pursue doctoral studies on transnational Jesuit networks and Asian Catholicism. I have presented on paradiplomacy and Jesuit-Protestant conflicts at conferences in Poland and Germany. My work supports scholarship through indexing and copy-editing publications on Catholic history and Jesuit studies.

C. Chit Wai John MOK & CHAN Shun-hing

Assessing the 2018 Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement and Its Implications on International Relations

In 2018, the Holy See, under the Pope Francis, reached a historical Provisional Agreement on Bishop Appointments with Beijing. The Agreement has been renewed thrice and remains in force. This paper addresses three research questions: 1. How has the Agreement transformed relations between China and the Holy See? 2. Is the Agreement a successful initiative when evaluated through the lens of Catholic individuals and communities in China? 3. How do the conditions faced by Catholics in China reflect Sino-Vatican dynamics? This paper argues, first, that the Agreement marks a significant shift in the Holy See's institutional logic in handling relations with China - moving from cautious negotiation to active appeasement. Second, evaluating the conditions of Catholic individuals and communities over the past seven years suggests that the Agreement has not been a successful initiative. Instead of promoting reconciliation between the open and underground communities, the Agreement has created confusion on the ground, exacerbating power struggles in certain dioceses and undermining the Pope's authority. Moreover, it has fallen short of ensuring religious freedom for Catholics in China and has provided local authorities with moral grounds to suppress non-conformist Catholics. Third, the Agreement has undermined the moral legitimacy of Chinese Catholics who previously remained loyal to the Pope and resisted the government. This has not only granted moral authority to Beijing, enhancing its regional and global standing, but also raised questions about the Holy See's reputation as a global defender of human rights.

Chit Wai John MOK is a Research Assistant Professor (sociology) in the Department of Applied Social Sciences at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research focuses on the sociology of culture, religion, and institutions. One of his ongoing projects investigates how Roman Catholic practitioners in contemporary China navigate ethical evaluations in an authoritarian context, using an analytical framework grounded in the institutional logics perspective. He has published articles in The China Quarterly, The China Journal, and Social Compass.

Discussant: Carsten VALA is Professor of Political Science at Loyola University Maryland. He is on leave during 2025-2027 to serve as director of KU Leuven's Loyola International Nachbahr Huis. He has studied the development of Chinese Protestants for two decades and published a book, articles, and other work on the interaction between this religious community and the contemporary Party-state.

PANEL 4 – Catholic Diplomacy on Asian Ground

From 20:00 to 22:00 Taipei Time

Chair: Bubbles B. ASOR, De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

Discussant: Alan Chong, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Papers:

A. Hendrikus Paulus KAUNANG:

From Cathedral to Istiqlal: “The Silaturahmi Tunnel” as a Symbol of Interfaith Diplomacy in Indonesia

“The Silaturahmi Tunnel” is a passage constructed to connect Jakarta’s Cathedral and the Istiqlal Mosque. Its construction represents a symbol of interfaith collaboration in Indonesia, aiming to strengthen social cohesion among religious communities. During his visit to Indonesia (3–6 September 2024), Pope Francis took the opportunity to visit the tunnel. On that occasion, the Pope remarked that the tunnel was not merely a physical structure but a symbol of solidarity, where dialogue and collaboration among different faiths could flourish. Indonesia is a plural society with a Muslim majority population (87%). Currently, six religions are officially served by the state (Buddhism, Catholicism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Protestantism), alongside the formal acknowledgment of indigenous belief systems known as the Believers of the One and Only God (Penghayat Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa). Within this context, in my opinion, religious organizations as non-state actors in international relations play a significant role in peacebuilding efforts within society. Through this study, using the Silaturahmi Tunnel as a case study, I aim to analyze how the Catholic Church employs soft power (manifested in its social teachings, service, and collaboration) to reinforce social cohesion and promote peace among religious groups, particularly in Indonesia. The Catholic Church has long been recognized as an active actor influencing global dynamics, not through hard power, but through soft power embodied in the Church’s social doctrine. The Silaturahmi Tunnel thus serves as a concrete representation of Catholic diplomacy, standing not merely as a construction but as a symbol of collaboration and peace.

Hendrikus Paulus Kaunang, M.A. (Ph.D. cand.) is a researcher affiliated with the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) and the Centre for Security and Peace Studies (CSPS) at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He is also a member of Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholic (ISAC), Singapore. He specializes in peace and conflict study, democracy, tourism, digital media and inter-religious studies. He actively participates in academic collaborations and publish some articles in a reputable journal. His recent work emphasizes the importance of digital inclusion for the indigenous religion community and also the significance of inclusive governance in the politics of tourism development in Indonesia.

B. Claribel LOW

Care for Creation Across Borders and Faiths: Singaporean Catholic Responses to the Climate Crisis

Anchored upon Pope Francis’ encyclical Laudato Si’ (2015), the Care for Creation (C4C) movement has gained traction in the past decade as the global climate crisis intensifies and more become keenly aware of the urgency for action.

In Singapore, the Archdiocese has stepped up efforts by appointing Caritas Singapore to lead the movement. Since then, September 1 to October 4 has been designated the Season of Creation and a C4C framework has been formally developed by Caritas Singapore to galvanise engagement across the entire Catholic community. These efforts must be seen as a dialogical exchange between the Vatican and the Singapore Archdiocese; in other words, the C4C movement in Singapore evolves in response to the direction and emphasis accorded by the

Vatican whilst the Vatican renders its support to bolster the local movement. Furthermore, given the global nature of the crisis climate, C4C is necessarily transnational. Importantly, it must be noted that these efforts have taken on an interreligious dimension as well. The inaugural Interreligious Earth Day Dialogue 2025, for example, gathered representatives from the major faiths to discuss their respective traditions' views on environmental stewardship and sustainable living amongst others. This makes the C4C movement an avenue through which the Singaporean Catholic community can engage other faiths in dialogue. With these in mind, this paper seeks to examine Singaporean Catholics' views on the burgeoning C4C movement and what they understand their role(s) to be, with an especial focus on the transnational and interreligious aspects of the movement.

Claribel Low is an Associate Research Fellow with the Social Cohesion Research Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) of Nanyang Technological University. She holds a Master of Science in Asian Studies from RSIS where she specialised in the comparative study of religion and interreligious relations in plural societies. Prior to that, she graduated from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Social Sciences (Honours) in Sociology and English Language. Her research interests include critical religion, interreligious relations, religious nationalism, religion-state relations, secularism and the sociology of knowledge.

C. George THADATHIL

Salesians in Higher Education in Papua New Guinea: A Catholic IR Perspective

This paper focuses on the contributions of individual Salesians from the Philippines and India who have worked in Papua New Guinea for the past three decades. It will consider how the Salesians' education and social programs in PNG have contributed to building social stability and community development. These align with the regional goals of peace and cooperation within the Island Nations of the Pacific. Their work with vulnerable populations and refugees supports social cohesion, contributing to the overall stability that PNG seeks to uphold in its regional relationships. The presentation will highlight the story of two institutions of Higher Education owned by the Salesians and in demand in the fields of technical and university-level education. The engagement of the Salesians from the Philippines and India, with their strong presence in Asian Catholic communities, and their backgrounds, has contributed to the Catholic life and vision in the Island nation, which is the premise of this presentation. The paper aligns with the vision of the conference to highlight 'untold stories of international collaboration and the involvement of Asian Catholics'. The existing literature on the IR often overlooks these individual stories and the engagement of the Church in the education and social sectors, even though these mark a milestone in people's development and deserve due attention. Therefore, this paper will look closely at two institutions - Don Bosco Technological Institute (DBTI), East Boroko, and Don Bosco Simbu Technical College (DBSTC), in Papua New Guinea and their protagonists as agents of Catholic International Relations.

*Prof George Thadathil, sdb, taught Philosophy at Salesian College, did research at Madras University and has published *Nepali Language, Culture and Identity* (2004), *Democracy in Darjeeling* (2023) and *Christian Education and Democracy in India* (2024). He was part of the Backwaters Collective on Metaphysics and Politics (Cochin Biennale) and a contributor to *India and Civilizational Futures* (2019), *The INDIANS: Histories of a Civilization* (2023) and founder editor of the *Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. He was awarded the Silver Plaque for Leadership in Higher Education by the International Association of Facilitators in 2019. He lives in Rome.*

D. David BUCKLEY:

The Catholic Church and Responding to Democratic Backsliding in the Philippines: Transnational Ties and Local Politics

How, and to what effect, have Asian Catholics campaigned against recent “democratic backsliding” on the continent? The Catholic Church was a central actor in late-twentieth century democratization in much of Asia, perhaps most prominently in the Philippines. However, since the turn of the century, democracy has come under strain across the continent. Moreover, the effectiveness of Catholic interventions to strengthen democracy has been called into question, both by the Church and its political critics. This paper documents and probes the effect of efforts by Filipino Catholics to respond to recent democratic backsliding in the country, both during the violent presidency of Rodrigo Duterte and the subsequent return of the Marcos family to executive power. Local Catholic leaders, including clergy, religious and laity, have, at times, intervened to strengthen democratic institutions. These interventions have drawn support from prominent clerical appointments in the Vatican and regional bishops’ conferences. However, reflecting Pope Francis’ emphasis on moving the Church “to the margins,” such transnational ties have greatest effect when rooted in local communities whose rights are under threat as democracy weakens. The paper draws on extensive field interviews, an original survey of parish priests, and documentation of parish-based interventions to promote democracy and rights.

*David Buckley is Associate Professor of Political Science, and Paul Weber Endowed Chair in Politics, Science & Religion at the University of Louisville, where he serves as the Director of the Center for Asian Democracy. His research focuses on the comparative relationship between religion and democracy. His book, *Protection at the Margins: The Catholic Church and Populist Violence in the Philippine Drug war* (co-authored with Steven Brooke) is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press. He previously served as a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow (2016-17) in the Department of State’s Office of Religion in Global Affairs.*

Discussant: Alan Chong is Senior Fellow at the Centre for Multilateralism Studies within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore. He has published widely on the notion of soft power and the role of ideas in constructing the international relations of Singapore and Asia. This has stemmed from his doctoral work on soft power in the early 2000s. These ideational angles have also led to inquiry into some aspects of ‘non-traditional security’ issues in Asia. His publications have appeared in *The Pacific Review*; *South East Asia Research*; *Global Studies Quarterly*; *Geopolitics*, and the *Review of International Studies*.