# Hong Kong’s Cardinal Joseph Zen granted permission to leave for Pope Francis’s funeral



Hong Kong's former Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Zen, known for his outspoken criticism of Beijing and the Vatican's dealings with China, has been permitted to leave the city to attend the funeral of Pope Francis in Vatican City. Zen, aged 93, departed Hong Kong on Wednesday night after successfully applying to the courts to have his passport returned, his secretary revealed to The Associated Press via text message on Thursday. His travel documents had previously been confiscated following his arrest under Hong Kong's national security law in 2022.

Zen’s arrest under the controversial law, on allegations of colluding with foreign forces, marked a significant moment for Hong Kong's Catholic community. Although he has not been formally charged under this law, Zen, along with five others, was fined last year after being found guilty of failing to register a fund established during the 2019 pro-democracy protests, intended to aid those detained. An appeal hearing is set for December.

Over recent years, Cardinal Zen has been an outspoken critic of the Vatican's agreement with Chinese authorities concerning the appointment of Catholic bishops. He claims this pact betrays Chinese Catholics who remain loyal to the Vatican. He has gone further by publicly criticising Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State responsible for negotiations with Beijing, calling him “a man of little faith.” Notably, Parolin is considered a leading candidate to succeed Pope Francis.

Reports emerged on Tuesday suggesting that Zen had questioned the early commencement of pre-conclave meetings for electing the new pope. While The Associated Press could not independently verify these reports, Zen reposted media coverage of his comments on his social media account, X.

Zen's secretary stated that he intends to return to Hong Kong following the funeral, scheduled for Saturday, although she was unsure of his exact return date. This is not the first occasion Zen has sought court approval to travel abroad; in 2023, he followed similar procedures to attend the funeral of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

In a related development, Hong Kong's Cardinal Stephen Chow will also travel to the Vatican to participate in the forthcoming conclave, according to the city's Catholic Social Communications Office. Chow recently hosted a visit in 2023 from a Beijing-appointed archbishop, marking the first official visit by a bishop from China's state-controlled Catholic church to Hong Kong. Observers at the time viewed this as a symbolic move potentially aimed at strengthening the fragile relationship between Beijing and the Vatican.

Diplomatic relations between Beijing and the Vatican have been severed since the rise of the Chinese Communist Party, accompanied by the expulsion of foreign priests and continued tension over ecclesiastical appointments. The Catholic faithful in China remain divided between the official state-sanctioned church and the underground church loyal to the pope. While the Vatican recognises members of both communities as Catholics, it maintains an exclusive claim over the authority to appoint bishops.

The Independent is reporting on these developments surrounding Cardinal Joseph Zen and the broader context of Vatican-China relations as the Catholic Church prepares for the election of a new pope.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.whec.com/national-world/hong-kong-allows-outspoken-cardinal-joseph-zen-to-attend-pope-francis-funeral/> - This article confirms that Cardinal Joseph Zen was allowed to leave Hong Kong to attend Pope Francis's funeral after successfully applying to have his passport returned, and that he departed Hong Kong on Wednesday night at age 93.
2. <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2025/apr/23/hong-kong-allows-outspoken-cardinal-joseph-zen-to-/> - Corroborates that Cardinal Zen's passport had been confiscated following his arrest under Hong Kong's national security law in 2022 and that he was permitted by the courts to travel abroad to the Vatican for the funeral.
3. <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2023/01/05/cardinal-zen-attends-benedict-xvi-funeral-after-hong-kong-authorities-release-passport/> - Supports the information that Zen previously obtained court approval to travel abroad to attend the funeral of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in 2023 after his passport was temporarily returned to him by Hong Kong authorities.
4. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253256/cardinal-zen-attends-benedict-xvi-funeral-after-hong-kong-authorities-release-passport> - Details Cardinal Zen's attendance at Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's funeral, including his court-granted travel permission to leave Hong Kong, confirming his history of needing official approval for international travel.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Zen> - Provides information on Cardinal Zen's arrest under Hong Kong's national security law, his passport confiscation, and the ongoing legal proceedings related to his activism and alleged collusion with foreign forces.
6. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-china-dealings-raise-concerns-church-leaders> - Outlines Cardinal Zen's critical stance on the Vatican's agreement with China regarding the appointment of bishops and his public criticisms of Cardinal Pietro Parolin, echoing Zen’s concerns over the impact of the deal on Chinese Catholics' loyalty to the Vatican.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/hong-kong-chinese-beijing-roman-catholic-vatican-city-b2738478.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data