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News update on religion and church in China : March 16 – July 6, 2021

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News Update on Religion and Church in China March 16 – July 6, 2021

Compiled by Katharina Feith, Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle), Katharina Wenzel-Teuber and Jan Kwee, with a contribution by Willi Boehi
Translated by David Streit SVD

The "News Update on Religion and Church in China" appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today's China *(*RCTC*). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between "News Updates" of two consecutive issues of* RCTC. *In these cases stories referred to in earlier "News Updates" will not be repeated. All "News Updates" can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last "News Update" (*RCTC *2021, No. 2, pp. 3-19) covered the period November 27, 2020 – March 11, 2021.*

Politics

March 22, 2021:

Following EU sanctions, China is imposing counter-sanctions on European politicians and scholars. More than 1,300 scholars sign solidarity statements

On March 22, European Union sanctions against four Chinese politicians working in Xinjiang and the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau for mass detentions in the region became final. For its part, China immediately imposed punitive measures against ten European individuals and four European organizations. Affected are five MEPs, including Reinhard Bütikofer (Greens), the head of the China delegation of the European Parliament, three other European politicians and the scholars Björn Jerdén and Adrian Zenz. The latter has been researching the re-education camps in Xinjiang. None of them, including their family members, will be allowed to enter mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau in the future. The Berlin-based Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament, the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the EU and the Alliance of Democracies Foundation in Denmark were also sanctioned.
In solidarity with Björn Jerdén, Adrian Zenz, the MERICS scholars and the British researcher Jo Smith Finley, who was also affected by sanctions, scholars from Europe and around the world – including many sinologists – published a "Solidarity Statement on Behalf of Scholars Sanctioned for their Work on China" on the Internet, which was signed by name by 1,336 researchers as of April 14, 2021. The sanctions are "the latest escalation of a process of constraining academic debate that has occurred over the last few decades," says the statement published in English and Chinese, which ends with the words: "We, the undersigned scholars, are therefore writing to express solidarity with all our persecuted colleagues. In doing so, we are calling on the Chinese government to revoke these unjustified sanctions and to accept that scholarship on China, like scholarship on any country, entails scrutiny of

its policies, goals and actions. We also pledge to continue to be inclusive in our own work and engage with all academic views, including those the Chinese government is trying to marginalise. We request our universities and research institutions to demonstrate their unconditional commitment to academic freedom, and we signal that the intimidation strategy being pursued here is unlikely to succeed. It is only by fostering critical and differentiated academic debate that scholarship can contribute to the global common good." (Statement can be found at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfV-fAIPteAVw45newLwTxaWGEaZydE6GPgO_ZyKh0F8-ZrbsQ/closedform; politico.com March 22; sueddeutsche.de March 22).

Religious Policy

April 19, 2021:

Bitter Winter: Grid management system is being used to combat cults – local government websites report on "grid-based" religious work

Bitter Winter, the website of the Turin-based organization CESNUR; reported that the teams for grid-based management (*wanggehua guanli* 网格化管理) in China are now also being used to combat "heretical cults" (*xiejiao* 邪教). Every grid (*wangge*) will have an anti-cult officer, and it is recommended that veteran or retired party cadres build up a team of anti-cult volunteers to search the grid for clues to cult members and to operate anti-cult propaganda among the residents.

Grids are the smallest monitoring and administrative units of the city administration. One grid covers an area of around 100 by 100 meters; in Jiangsu, a grid comprised an average of 670 people in 2020. The term comes from computer language. Grids use mapping and geocoding technology to collect information that is shared with government agencies. Grids were first tested in 2004. Their value for social control and the provision of services was particularly evident during the corona pandemic (according to J. Ch. Mittelstaedt).

Between April and June 2021, reports were posted on local government websites, in which the integration of religious work into grid management was mentioned. In the city of Jiamusi in Heilongjiang, for example, a three-day provincial training course on the subject of grid management in religious work ended on May 13. In Gaogang Town, Fogang County, Guangdong, grid members visited rural households at night in late April to conduct cult-related searches and anti-cult propaganda; the focus was on the Church of "Almighty God." However, everything was "cult-free" (bitterwinter.org April 19; fogang.gov.cn May 6; jmsxww.com May 14; cf. Jean Christopher Mittelstaedt, "The grid management system in contemporary China: Grass-roots governance in social surveillance and service provision," in: *China Information*, May 2, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X211011565).

May 1, 2021:

"Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel" take effect

This is the most comprehensive administrative law regulation to date for the supervision of religious clergy by the state. The measures were enacted on February 9, 2021 by the National Religious Affairs Administration. A German translation can be found in *China heute* 2021, No. 2, pp. 96-105, and a description of the context and content of the very restrictive document can be found ibid., pp. 73-76. See also *China heute* 2021, No. 1, pp. 3-4 (aspects relating to the Sino-Vatican agreement on the appointment of bishops, in German), and *RCTC* 2021, No. 2, p. 6.

May 1, 2021:

National Religious Affairs Administration issues "Measures for the Administration of Institutes for Religious Education"

This is the most comprehensive administrative law regulation to date for the supervision by the state of Koran institutes, Buddhist and Daoist academies, and Protestant and Catholic theological seminars. The legislation will take effect on September 1, 2021.

Articles 2 and 7 of the "Measures for the Administration of Institutes for Religious Education" explain that institutes for religious education are institutions at middle and university level for the training of religious personnel and other specialist staff. These institutes do not belong to the state educational system, their academic degrees are only valid within the religion. They may only be established by the official religious organizations at national or provincial level (Article 3). They serve the purpose of training "patriotic young talents of the religions" who interpret the religious teachings correctly, adhere to the Sinicization, are politically reliable, etc. (Article 4). They may not be controlled by foreign authorities or operated in cooperation with foreign organizations or persons (Article 5). The share of community studies (i.e. not religion-related) lessons must be at least 30% of the total number of lessons, including courses on ideological and political theory, as well as Chinese culture and society, first and foremost the in-depth study of Xi-Jinping's thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new age (Article 39).

The very long document has 9 chapters with 83 paragraphs. Chapter 2 (Establishment) and Chapter 6 (Employment of Foreign Experts) replaces prior regulations from 2007 and 1998 respectively. Foreign experts for whom admission to employment has been applied may not have made any statements hostile to China in the past (Article 61.5). The remaining chapters are General Provisions (Chapter 1), Organization and Assurance (Chapter 3), Education and Teaching Activities (Chapter 4), Faculty and Students (Chapter 5), Supervision and Administration (Chapter 7), Legal Responsibility (Chapter 8) and Supplementary Provisions (Chapter 9).

The text of the 宗教院校管理办法 can be found at www.sara.gov.cn/ywdt/354264.jhtml. A German translation with commentary will appear in one of the coming issues of *China heute*.

July 1, 2021:

Communist Party of China celebrates 100th anniversary of its founding. The religions are called on to express loyalty



Protestant Catholic joint performance to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party in the Protestant church of Qiaoxi, Zhangjiakou, on June 26. Photo: xinde.org.

In the run-up to July 1, the religious affairs authorities carried out a patriotic education campaign in which the official religious communities at all levels had to participate. The motto was: "Study the party history, feel the goodness of the party, listen to the party, go with the party" (*xue dang shi*, *gan dang en*, *ting dang hua*, *gen dang zou* 学党史, 感党恩, 听党话, 跟党走). Another motto of the education campaign was "Love the party, love the country, love socialism" (*ai dang ai guo ai shehuizhuyi* 爱党爱国爱社会主义), or the "Three Loves" for short. In a

joint call on April 9, 2021, the national governing bodies of the five religions, together with the YMCA and YWCA, appealed to religious circles throughout the country to carry out education for the "Three Loves." Religious representatives were organized to participate in "red" pilgrimages to memorials to the revolution; religious groups also held cultural galas with the theme "A Heart for the Party" (see report in *China heute* 2021, No. 2, pp. 72-73).

Daoism

May 26, 2021:

Master Ren Farong, former chairman of the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA), dies

Master Ren Farong 任法融 was born in 1936 in Tianshui, Gansu Province. The following curriculum vitae can be found on the CDA website: At the age of 19, Ren visited the Longmendong Daoist temple complex in Shaanxi and became a student of Master Wang Zhilin of the Longmen School of Quanzhen Daoism. From 1957, he studied with Master Liang Zonghe at Louguantai Monastery in Zhouzhi County for ten years. From 1980 he was back at Louguantai Monastery, where he was in a leading position as *jianyuan* 监院 from 1984 to 2005. In 1989 he received the triple ordination (*santan dajie* 三坛大戒) in the Baiyun Temple in Beijing. From 1986 to 2014 he was president of the Daoist Association of Shaanxi, from 2005 to 2015 president of the Chinese Daoist Association. He was a member of the Political Consultative Conferences at the provincial and national levels.

The CDA obituary highlights Master Ren's contribution to the reconstruction [after the Cultural Revolution] of Louguantai Monastery and other Daoist monasteries in Shaanxi, Shanxi and Gansu. He devoted himself to the study of Daoism (among other things he wrote a commentary on the *Daodejing*), calligraphy and painting. Ren supported the development of teaching staff and the compilation of teaching materials for the Chinese Daoist Academy and promoted the establishment of local Daoist academies. The résumé also mentions Ren's commitment to welfare and exchange with other countries. All official obituaries refer to Ren Farong as "a friend of the Communist Party of China."

Various Western journalists, such as Ian Johnson in the *Wall Street Journal*, associate Master Ren with environmental protection. Johnson wrote in 2010 that Ren had organized a conference on ecology and Daoism at Louguantai Monastery three years earlier. According to Johnson, Ren described the melting of the polar caps, earthquakes and epidemics as a result of a "lack of harmony." In a motion, he called on the government to take seriously the drought that was prevalent in southwest China at the time as a result of environmental abuse and urged it to improve environmental protection, Johnson reported (www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=6872&p='p' [Obituary CDA]; wsj.com March 12, 2010; *Xinhua* June 2).

Buddhism

May 10, 2021:

Radio Free Asia reports on the ban on religious objects in schools in the Sog County of Tibet

Citing a local source, *Radio Free Asia* (*RFA*) has reported that parents and other relatives in Sog (Chinese: Suo) County in Nagqu, Tibet Autonomous Region, are no longer allowed to carry religious items such as prayer beads or prayer wheels with them or to recite mantras or prayers when visiting their

children in school. The ban applies to all elementary and middle schools in the district, *RFA* said. According to *RFA*, since the beginning of April, such notices had appeared on the boards of the Tibetan schools in Sog district, saying: "Schools are places to cultivate and produce socialist scholars, and should not be used as places in which to follow rituals and traditions" (rfa.org May 10).

May 21, 2021:

China's State Council publishes White Paper titled: "Tibet Since 1951: Liberation, Development and Prosperity"

On the 70th anniversary of Tibet's "liberation" in 1951, the State Council published an extensive exposition of the government's official narrative on the history of Tibet as part of China since ancient times. The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama have been installed by the Chinese central government since the Qing Dynasty, the White Paper says. It describes in detail the achievements in Tibet today, with particular emphasis on the "complete victory over poverty." The Tibetan language and the "fine traditional culture of Tibet" as well as freedom of belief are protected, the White Paper says. According to the White Paper, Tibet has 1,700 sites for Tibetan Buddhist activities with 46,000 monks and nuns, four mosques with 12,000 native Muslims, and a Catholic church with 700 believers. "The reincarnation of Living Buddhas has been carried out in an orderly manner in accordance with laws, regulations, religious rituals and historical conventions," thus the White Paper. It mentions the government's "Measures for the Administration of Reincarnations of Living Buddhas of Tibetan Buddhism" [2007] and refers to the use of the "golden urn" [for the drawing of lots, which the Chinese leadership considers necessary for historical reasons to determine the Dalai Lama and other high-ranking incarnations]. The White Paper states that, as of 2020, 92 reincarnations of Tibetan Buddhism have been identified and approved. Finally, it sets out "guidelines for governing Tibet in the new era" in 10 points, of which point 1 and point 10 include upholding the leadership of the CPC and strengthening the party. Another point is: "We must develop religions in a Chinese context" (text of the White Paper at www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/21/c_139959978.htm).

May 30, 2021:

For the first time, the Chinese Buddhist Academy has granted four post-graduate doctoral degrees

As reported by the Chinese Buddhist Academy, four doctoral candidates – all four of them monks – defended their theses on May 30 before a defense commission made up of professors from state universities and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The commission was headed by Wei Daoru, member of the CASS academic council. One of the commissioners was Dharma Master Zhanru, a professor at Peking University. The committee members decided by anonymous votes whether the candidates had passed. All four received a "doctoral degree of institutes for religious education" (zgfxy.cn June 2).

The qualifications of institutes for religious education are only valid internally. On November 26, 2020, doctoral examinations were held for the first time at the Protestant National Theological Seminary in Nanjing; see *RCTC* 2021, No. 2, p. 11.

Popular Beliefs

March 11, 2021:

Harbin City bans the production, sale and burning of paper money on the occasion of the Qingming Festival

As reported by the news website *The Paper*, the city of Harbin in Heilongjiang, northern China, announced on March 11 that it would take strict action against the production, distribution, sale and burning of paper money. Traditionally, graves are swept on the Qingming Festival (April 4, 2021) to commemorate the dead; this also includes the custom of burning what is known as "spirit money."
According to the *Global Times*, the ban in Harbin sparked a broad discussion on social media, and a corresponding hashtag on Sina Weibo achieved 47 million reads. A message on the website of Harbin's Xiangfang district also called for measures to control the flow of visitors to the cemeteries in the interests of Corona prevention; people should be instructed in "civilized sweeping" and green, environmentally friendly forms of remembrance of the dead, such as remembrance at home, Internet sacrifices, long-distance sacrifices while hiking or tree-planting sacrifices. Other cities also encouraged "civilized grave sweeping," according to the *Global Times*. The *Global Times* cites a 2005 provision in the national regulations on funeral management saying that anyone who "manufactures or sells feudal superstition-related products shall have their items confiscated by the authorities, and fined no less than once but no more than three times the sales amount" (globaltimes.cn March 22; hrbxf.gov.cn March 24; thepaper.cn March 21).

Islam

May 6, 2021:

Associated Press – Imam: the number of those taking part in the Friday prayers at the Id-kah Mosque in Kashgar is in decline

A decade ago, 4,000 to 5,000 believers attended Friday prayers in the Id-Kah Mosque. Now there are only 800 to 900, said Mamat Juma, imam of the mosque, according to a report by the *Associated Press*. The Imam attributed this decline to a change in values and not to government policy; he said the younger generation would rather spend more time working than praying (*Associated Press* May 6).

May 13, 2021:

Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) publishes study on the detention of Imams and religious figures in Xinjiang

Washington-based UHRP said that it has examined a data set of 1,046 cases of Turkic, mostly Uighur imams or other religious figures detained since 2014 in Xinjiang (the study uses the term East Turkestan), for their association with religious teaching and community leadership. For its documentation, UHRP used court documents, reports from family members, public media reports, "leaked" documents, etc. Since it is extremely difficult to get information from the region, their data probably represents only the "tip of the iceberg," according to the study.
The main results of the study can be summarized as follows: Among the 1,046 cases examined were 850 imams, 122 mullahs (Muslim scholars), 20 muezzins, 33 *talib*s (students of religion) and some

people with other professional information (possibly former imams). Of these 1,046 people [date of information not specified] currently 428 are detained in prisons and 202 in camps, 18 released (8 of whom are under house arrest), 18 died in detention or shortly after release (three of whom were older than 80 years); in a further 378 cases the current status of the persons is unknown. The peak of the arrests was in 2017 [when the mass detention of Uyghurs in centers for re-education began], but 19% of the arrests occurred already between 2013 and 2015. Among those detained in camps or prisons are 23 women; according to the study, many of them are referred to using the masculine terms mullah or imam; they are probably *büwi*, i.e. Muslim women who instruct children religiously, lead religious meetings of women, etc. For some of those detained in prisons, records show what allegations were made against them: 61 cases (30% of known charges) related to "illegal teaching," "illegal preaching" and "teaching children religion." 50 cases (25%) had to do with "religious affiliation" and included acts such as "spreading religious propaganda" or "being an imam." Other reasons for imprisonment included officiating or preaching at weddings (5%), praying (5%), traveling or communicating with foreign countries (4%), possession or distribution of "illegal religious materials" (3%). In 304 cases it is known how many years of imprisonment the persons concerned were sentenced to: 96% of these were sentenced to at least 5 years in prison, of which 25% were sentenced to 20 years or longer. Many of the imams in the data set years earlier had worked in official religious capacities and were approved by the government, the study said.

The study points out that imams have fewer and fewer places to preach or pray, as around 16,000 mosques in Xinjiang have been destroyed or damaged since 2017 (figures based on a Sept. 2020 study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute). The study entitled "Islam Dispossessed: China's Persecution of Uyghur Imams and Religious Figures" can be found at https://uhrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Islam-Dispossessed_2021-05-15.pdf. See also *RCTC* 2020, No. 4, p. 10; 2021, No. 1, p. 7. According to the State Council's 2016 White Paper "Freedom of Religious Belief in Xinjiang," there were 24,400 mosques and 29,000 Muslim clerics in Xinjiang at that time.

June 2021:

Training course for female representatives of the Islamic circles in Hainan

The training was carried out by the United Front Department and the Islamic Association of Hainan Province, according to a report on the website of the Chinese Islamic Association. During the training, the United Front representative expressed his expectation that the Muslim women of the province will in future stick to the Sinicization of Islam and its adaptation to socialism, actively participate in the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port and develop the positive role of Muslim women in charity, economic development and social harmony. One of the topics of the training was risk prevention in the construction of the free trade port. The training also included visits to Gansu and Qinghai at Red Army patriotic memorials and religious sites. 22 people took part in the training course; the group photo shows 13 Muslim women.

The reasons for this rather unusual religious-political training especially for Muslim women are not entirely clear. On June 10, 2021, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress passed a law on the Hainan Free Trade Port. The whole island is to be developed into a globally influential free trade port by the middle of the century.

In September 2020, there were reports, including in the *South China Morning Post*, that the religious customs of the 10,000-member Muslim ethnic group of the Utsul in Hainan were under pressure. A hijab ban imposed on schools at the beginning of September 2020 met with resistance and was temporarily lifted after hundreds of schoolgirls refused to take off their headscarves (chinaislam.net.cn June 21; german.china.org.cn June 11; cf. *RCTC* 2020, No. 4, pp. 10-11).

Protestantism

April 25, 2021:

Arrests during a church service in Shenzhen

On April 25, a service at the Trinity Gospel Harvest Church in Shenzhen was interrupted by security forces. Pastors Cao Yuan and Mao Zhibin and eight parishioners were detained. The police action took place a few days after Shi Minglei, who is living in exile in the US, met with employees of the State Department there. During this meeting, the situation of her husband Cheng Yuan, who is a well-known human rights activist and head of the NGO Changsha Funeng, was discussed; Cheng has been in custody since July 2020. The spouses were members of the Trinity Gospel Harvest Church (*AsiaNews* April 26).
Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

End of March and End of April 2021:

Korean churches closed

In the provinces of Zhejiang and Jilin, Korean congregations, in which mainly members of the Korean minorities in China gathered for Protestant services, were banned and closed in late March and late April. The congregations belonged to the association of the "Good News Mission Baptist Church Korea," a global group with a missionary character, which is represented in 80 countries. The ban is unexpected as the Yanbian (Jilin) community has existed for decades and the church is not classified as a "harmful cult" (*UCAN* June 15).
Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

June 22-23, 2021:

European Network of Amity Partners (ENAP) meets online

In the 34th year of its existence, the European partner network of the Chinese aid organization Amity Foundation, founded on the initiative of Christians, met virtually for the first time. The invitation was made by Evangelical Mission Worldwide (EMW) under the leadership of Dr. Eckhard Zemmrich; the preparation took place in bilateral agreement with She Hongyu from Amity. This time the digital format allowed the participation from as much as ten representatives from the Amity side, connected from Nanjing, Hong Kong, Beijing and Manila. There were also almost 20 participants from Germany, Norway, Scotland, England and the Netherlands. While the first day was devoted to the consequences of the corona pandemic for one's own work and reports on the China projects of the European organizations and projects, the second day focused on an exchange on the role of ENAP from a Chinese and European perspective. Amity's chair Qiu Zhonghui said that China was ready to take on more responsibility for solving global problems. Amity Foundation relies on the help of European partners for its planned further internationalization. The European side emphasized the importance of using the trust that has been built on the basis of decades of cooperation in order to maintain and expand spaces for dialogue, exchange and future cooperation projects. There was consensus in the belief that global problems such as poverty, conflict and environmental degradation require global solutions, on which the members of ENAP want to work together in the future.
Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

March 16, 2021:

Wenzhou: 200,000 yuan fine following private episcopal Mass

According to *AsiaNews*, after Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin celebrated a holy Mass in a private chapel on March 16 for a group of 20 other believers, the owner, 56-year-old Huang Ruixun in Wangli, Cangnan County, Wenzhou diocese, Zhejiang Province, was made to pay a fine of 200,000 yuan (more than $25,000). The charge was that he hosted the bishop for "illegal religious activities" and provided him with lunch and toilet facilities. Bishop Shao is recognized as Bishop of Wenzhou by the Vatican, but not yet by the Chinese government. Obviously, the extremely high sentence is related to the revised "Regulations on Religious Affairs" that came into force on February 1, 2018. Religious activities may only take place in officially registered locations. Article 71 states: "Where conditions are provided for unlawful religious activities, the religious affairs departments are to give a warning and confiscate the unlawful gains or illegal assets, if any; where the circumstances are serious, a fine of between 20,000 and 200,000 yuan is to be imposed [...]." As a result of the regulations, underground religious activities are classified even more clearly than before under the heading of illegal and criminal offenses.
Despite the Sino-Vatican Agreement of September 2018, the underground Church is under increasing pressure and it is becoming more and more difficult for its believers to meet. As Fr. Bernardo Cervellera writes in *AsiaNews*, official and unofficial bishops came together in the past and the official Church made churches available to the underground in various places for Masses and celebrations. This type of hospitality – thus Cervellera – now becomes risky and "illegal" – also due to the "Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel" (German translation in *China heute* 2021, No. 2, pp. 96-105), which have been in force since May 1, 2021; "it creates a greater division between official and underground communities, making the reconciliation, so desired by Pope Francis, even more distant." (*AsiaNews* April 27).

March 29, 2021:

A report on the website of the Catholic governing bodies speaks for the first time of a "party branch secretary" in the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association

The announcement on the official website of the Catholic governing bodies – the Patriotic Association and the Chinese Bishops' Conference – reported that the two governing bodies had been trained in partisan history. It says: "Tian Yueyang 田悦阳, Director of the Research Office and Secretary of the Party Branch of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, gave a lecture" (www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/21030694-1.htm).
It was not previously known that there was a party branch secretary in the Patriotic Association. Editorial staff of *China heute* found out that Tian Yueyang's name is mentioned in the imprint of the magazine *Zhongguo zongjiao* 中国宗教 (*China Religion*) between 2003 and 2016, first in individual issues of this magazine and from 2006 to September 2013 permanently as *Zhongguo zongjiao*'s "Director for Material Collection and Editing." *Zhongguo zongjiao* is the magazine of the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA). On May 30, 2014 Tian Yueyang appeared for the first time on the website of the Patriotic Association and Bishops' Conference, chinacatholic.cn, as head of their Research Office (www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/14053950-1.htm). So it seems possible that he was delegated there by the NRAA. A search on chinacatholic.cn did not give any further results for the keywords "party

branch" / "party branch secretary." The appearance of this term in the office of the Patriotic Association reportedly caused concern among Catholics on the mainland.

April 13, 2021:

Catholic home for the disabled in Zhaoxian, Hebei Province, closed by authorities

According to a report by *AsiaNews*, the "Liming zhi jia" home run by Catholic sisters for children and young people with mental and physical disabilities who had been abandoned by their families was closed by local authorities in mid-April. The home was founded in 1988 by the then underground Bishop Raimund Wang Chonglin and has since been run by the sisters of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus. The children and young people are said to have been placed in state homes. At first, according to *AsiaNews*, the sisters and employees were allowed to continue to visit the children and young people with whom they had lived for years, but then the authorities forbade contact with the under 18-year-olds. This could have something to do with the ban on evangelizing minors, thus *AsiaNews*. *AsiaNews* furthermore suspected that the closure was also related to the dismantling of all structures connected to the underground Church. Bishop Wang was the last underground bishop of Zhaoxian Diocese which the government incorporated into the official Xingtai Diocese. The bishop died on February 2, 2010. Since then, Zhaoxian has had an Apostolic Administrator appointed by the Vatican. The Liming Home was known far beyond the borders of Hebei Province for its professionalism, good training of the staff, exemplary management, but above all for the loving treatment of the children and young people. Liming is not the only Catholic orphanage or home for the disabled that has recently been closed by the authorities. Another home was closed in Renqiu, Xianxian Diocese, and one each in Zhangjiakou and Zhengding, all in Hebei Province. A Catholic orphanage in Baoji, Shaanxi Province, had to close two years ago (*AsiaNews* April 13 and 14).

April 23, 2021:

Official Catholic governing bodies prepare the 10th National Assembly of Representatives of Chinese Catholicism

The regular joint meeting of the leaders of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference decided to convene the 10th National Assembly of Representatives of Chinese Catholicism – the highest body of official Catholicism in China. Bishop Fang Xingyao, chairman of the Patriotic Association, said, among other things, that "this year" there will be a change of leadership – an indication that the national assembly, which is due every five years, is to take place in 2021. He spoke of the establishment of a leading team for the preparation of the change of office and a careful revision of the statutes [of the Patriotic Association and the Bishops' Conference] in accordance with the "Measures for the Administration of Religious Organizations" [which came into force in 2020]. The meeting also consulted on the work report to be presented to the National Assembly and discussed ideas for work over the next five years. In his speech during the meeting, an unnamed "leader" of the Central United Front Department of the Communist Party of China called for "strict control of the political barriers for delegates," which must be the highest principle. Another topic of the session was the celebration of the 100th anniversary of China's Communist Party. Bishop Fang said that in this significant year, Chinese Catholicism would continue to adhere to the principle of independence and adaptation to socialism (chinacatholic.cn April 26).

May 20 and 21, 2021:

Underground Bishop Zhang Weizhu, 10 priests and 10 seminarians from Xinxiang Apostolic Prefecture have been arrested

In a large police operation including a raid on the old factory building in Shaheqiao, Hebei Province, used as a seminary by the Apostolic Prefecture of Xinxiang, Henan Province, and made available for this purpose by a Catholic, the 63-year-old underground Bishop Joseph Zhang Weizhu, 10 priests and 10 seminarians were arrested. Ordained in 1991, Bishop Zhang Weizhu was appointed by Rome as Bishop of Xinxiang Apostolic Prefecture in 1998, but was never recognized as such by the Chinese government, which instead appointed an administrator for Xinxiang in 2010. Together with three other seminarians who were later arrested and who were initially able to flee, all 13 seminarians were sent home with a ban on theological training and the 10 priests were released again. Before their release, they had to undergo political courses, according to *AsiaNews*. As of mid-July, Bishop Zhang Weizhu was still in custody (*AsiaNews* May 22, 24; July 15; *UCAN* May 24, 31).

July 2, 2021:

Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association announces recruitment of four university graduates who are members of the Communist Youth League

As already reported (*China heute* 2021, No. 1, p. 5 [in German]), since 2019 the Patriotic Association has officially advertised 13 positions for university graduates – in 2021 on the "Public Recruitment Service Platform for Institutions under the Central and State Organs" of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.
On July 2, the Patriotic Association announced on its website the names of four female university graduates who are now being hired. All four are members of the Communist Youth League and have M.A. degrees from various state universities. A graduate of Marxist philosophy will work in the secretariat of the Patriotic Association and a graduate of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature will work in its publications and editing department. In the National Theological Seminary in Beijing, a law graduate will be hired for the secretariat, and a graduate of English/Interpreting will teach English (www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/21070243-1.htm).

July 6, 2021:

UCAN: Catholic author remains in custody

The 30-year-old Catholic author Pang Jian – who writes under the pseudonym Gao Yang – is still in custody, according to a report by *UCAN* dated July 6, 2021. He had been arrested in January in his home village of Pangcheng, Gaobeidian, Hebei. His father told *Radio Free Asia* that Pang was arrested after writing about forced demolitions and evictions in rural areas around Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. He was arrested during a corona test. The family was later informed that he was being held in Gaobeidian Detention Center on suspicion of inciting secession. He is not allowed to receive any visitors. Pang Jian also reported on the Catholic Church in Hebei and took photos of almost all the churches in Hebei. He also spoke in Hong Kong media about the underground community in Hebei, according to the *UCAN* report (*UCAN* July 6).

Sino-Vatican Relations

April 5, 2021:

The Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, in an interview with the Spanish broadcaster COPE on the situation of the Catholic Church in China

When asked about the reality and the future of the Catholic Church in China, Cardinal Parolin said: "Certainly the Church in China is a fundamental part of the Catholic Church and everything that has been and is tried is aimed at securing this community, which is still small, but has great strength and vitality. Everything that is done is to ensure normal life in the Church in China. Spaces for religious freedom, for communion, because one cannot live in the Catholic Church without communion with the Successor of Peter, with the Pope. So we look with great respect to the Church in China, also because of its history, the future is based on history, a history with a lot of suffering." The cardinal spoke of hopeful steps towards reconciliation within the Church, even if not yet all problems are resolved. "An evangelical role in Chinese society with all its wealth and problems. I would say this is a positive outlook. There is great expectation of what the Church in China can give the worldwide Catholic Church," the Cardinal said (www.cope.es/programas/el-espejo/noticias/cardenal-parolin-espejo-europa-esta-perdiendo-identidad-persona-20210405_1221248).

May 23, 2021:

Why is the Vatican silent on China and Hong Kong? Vatican Foreign Minister interviewed by *America Magazine*

Journalist Gerard O'Connell asked Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher if he had noticed any warming in relations between China and the Holy See in recent years. The bishop felt that there was greater openness to discussing questions; however, the Holy See is negotiating "with a very, very small group of people" from the large government structure, so it is difficult to say "what the impact is of what they take back to Beijing or what we bring to Beijing." The archbishop said that there is currently no plan for a high-level meeting on the level of Cardinal Parolin or himself. With regard to the Vatican not speaking out against China's restrictions on religious freedom and its repression of the Uighurs in Xinjiang Province as well as the democracy movement in Hong Kong, Gallagher said, "I think you will find it true that the Holy See does not have a policy, a diplomatic policy, of denunciation almost anywhere in the world, and there are human rights abuses in many, many countries." He also said, "We believe in trying to work with the Chinese. [...] the question of the nomination of bishops has been and remains a big priority." When asked about the Vatican's silence on Hong Kong, the archbishop said that the Catholic community in Hong Kong "in itself is significantly divided on the policy" and that in his opinion "'grandstanding' statements" would not be very effective.

The sinologist Fr. Gianni Criveller, PIME, commenting on the interview in *UCAN*, said that finding human rights violations around the world is a poor argument to justify the silence about China and Hong Kong. It seems to him a case "where one is strong with the weak and weak with the strong." Criveller further said: "To the best of my knowledge, most Catholics in Hong Kong are sincerely disappointed. In the midst of their great anguish, the Vatican was silent" (*America* March 23; *UCAN* March 25).

May 24, 2021:

World Day of Prayer for the Church in China

After the Regina Caeli prayer on May 23 in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis said: "Tomorrow the Catholic faithful in China will celebrate the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians and heavenly Patroness of their great country. The Mother of the Lord and of the Church is venerated with particular devotion in the Sheshan Shrine in Shanghai, and is invoked assiduously by Christian families, in the trials and hopes of daily life. How good and how necessary it is that the members of a family and of a Christian community are ever more united in love and in faith! In this way, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, pastors and faithful can follow the example of the first disciples who, on the solemnity of Pentecost, were united in prayer with Mary as they awaited the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I invite you to accompany with fervid prayer the Christian faithful in China, our dearest brothers and sisters, whom I carry in the depth of my heart. May the Holy Spirit, protagonist of the Church's mission in the world, guide them and help them to be bearers of the Good News, witnesses of goodness and charity, and builders of justice and peace in their country" (www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2021/documents/papa-francesco_regina-caeli_20210523.html).
In his 2007 letter to the Chinese Church, Pope Benedict designated May 24 as the day of prayer for the Church in China. The Marian Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai, however, was closed to pilgrims in 2021 as in the previous year. The Diocese of Shanghai canceled all May pilgrimages on April 6, citing COVID-19 prevention as the reason for this, while at the same time, as reported by *AsiaNews*, a popular amusement park and the golf club on Sheshan remained open.
On March 14, Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon (Myanmar), the chairman of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, called for a week of prayer for the Chinese Church from May 23 to 30, according to *UCAN*. On May 20, the chairman of the Justitia et Pax commission of the American bishops, Bishop David Malloy of Rockford, joined Cardinal Bo's appeal (*AsiaNews* April 12; *CNA* May 21; *UCAN* March 14).

Hong Kong

April 16, 2021:

Hong Kong: Nine leading democracy activists sentenced to prison

After being convicted of organizing and participating in an unauthorized large-scale demonstration in late August 2019, nine activists were sentenced to between 8 and 18 months in prison. The defendants had already been found guilty at the beginning of April. Around 1.7 million people took part in the peaceful demonstration. The penalties are also seen in the context of Hong Kong's national security law, which came into effect at the end of June 2020. Since then, dozens of democracy activists have been arrested – apparently also for "offenses" that occurred before the law came into force.
Among those convicted are a number of Christians, including the 82-year-old founder of the Hong Kong Democratic Party, former MP and co-author of the Hong Kong Basic Law, Martin Lee, a Catholic, whose 11-month sentence has apparently been suspended due to his age (as was also the punishment of three other defendants). The well-known 72-year-old media entrepreneur and founder of the pro-democracy *Apple Daily,* Jimmy Lai, was baptized as an adult and received 14 months in prison. He has been arrested several times in the past but this is the first time that he has been sentenced to prison. The 64-year-old Anglican trade unionist and former MP Lee Cheuk-yan received a one-year prison sentence (www.ARD-aktuell/tagesschau.de April 16; *UCAN* April 17).

April 21, 2021:

President of the Baptist Convention leaves Hong Kong

Pastor Lo Hing-choi, who was confirmed as president of the Baptist Convention of Hong Kong in 2020, resigned from office on April 21, according to reports in the local *Christian Times* magazine, and moved to Great Britain with his wife. According to his own statement, the increasing restriction of civil liberties is the only motivation for this step. Pastor Lo is known for criticizing the security law and supporting the protest movement in Hong Kong. Articles that publicly attacked him had appeared in several magazines loyal to Beijing, which observers believe can be interpreted as a prelude to personal restrictions and possible arrest. The evangelical pastors Wong Siu-yung and Yeung Kin-keung, who in 2020, as signers of the "Evangelical Declaration," had called on believers to resist any totalitarian system, had already gone into exile after being described in the press as subversive and secessionist (*AsiaNews* April 22).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

April 28, 2021:

Controversial immigration bill passed in Hong Kong parliament

Human rights activists, democracy activists and diplomats fear that the law, which was passed on April 28 and comes into force on August 1, will give the authorities very far-reaching powers to ban entry and exit. Security Secretary John Lee countered this criticism, saying that the main focus was on the fight against illegal immigration and the abuse of asylum. Travel rights would remain guaranteed and the government would introduce subsidiary legislation in the near term. The Hong Kong Bar Association (HKBA) complained in February, according to a *Reuters* report on April 28, that the law failed to explain why the powers were necessary and how they were applied. There was also no time limit for a travel ban and no safeguards against abuse. The Security Bureau then stated that the law only applies to inbound flights and targets illegal immigration. According to the government, there are said to be 13,000 asylum seekers in Hong Kong, on average only 1 percent of them are granted asylum. According to *AFP*, however, in the opinion of lawyers, the law would also be applicable to people who want to leave Hong Kong (*AFP* April 28; *Reuters* April 28).

May 17, 2021:

Fr. Stephen Chow Sau-yan SJ appointed Catholic Bishop of Hong Kong



Stephen Chow Sau-yan SJ.
Photo: SJ Generalate, Rome.

On May 17, the Vatican announced that the incumbent Provincial of the Chinese Province of the Society of Jesus had been appointed "Bishop of the Diocese of Hong Kong, China." The episcopal ordination will take place on December 4 in Hong Kong. With the appointment of Stephen Chow, born in 1959, the end of an almost two and a half year vacancy is in sight. After the death of Hong Kong Bishop Michael Yeung in January 2019, his predecessor, Cardinal John Tong, now 82, assumed the office of Apostolic Administrator of the diocese at the request of the Pope.

Chow knows the situation in Hong Kong well, he is committed to youth and education, is supposed to be a man of dialogue and balance, spiritually and with strong leadership qualities. This will be necessary in the deeply divided Hong Kong society and Church.

Stephen Chow SJ was born in Hong Kong on August 7, 1959. He studied in the USA and Hong Kong, including a doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard University in Boston. He was ordained a priest on July 16, 1994 by Cardinal John Baptist Wu. Stephen Chow has worked primarily in the education sector in Hong Kong, an area in which Beijing has increasingly tried to exert influence in recent years. Since 2007 he has been the supervisor of two Jesuit colleges in Hong Kong and teaches psychology at the Holy Spirit Diocesan Seminary, among other things.
With the appointment of Stephen Chow, there are great hopes for the future of the diocese and the society in Hong Kong, which is probably facing the greatest challenges since the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997 (*America Magazine* May 17; *AsiaNews* May 17, 18; ; *Sunday Examiner* May 18; *UCAN* May 17; https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/05/17/0303/00667.html).

June 4 / July 1, 2021:

Hong Kong's churches participate in Tian'anmen commemoration

This year, memorial services for the victims of the Tian'anmen massacre on June 4, 1989 were held in seven Catholic churches. Bishop Emeritus Cardinal Joseph Zen presided over a memorial Mass for the victims of the massacre at St. Andrew's Church. "We refuse to be pessimistic," emphasized the cardinal in his sermon. The dead would have sacrificed their lives "for our democracy, our freedom." Some people would say that the martyrs are already in heaven, they have been commemorated for 32 years, now that is enough. The cardinal opposed this, saying that the voice of the people must continue to be heard. Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha celebrated another memorial service at St. Francis Church in Kowloon. The churches were the only legal place where meetings could be held that evening this year. – As in the previous year, the Hong Kong government had banned the otherwise annual large memorial candlelight vigil in Victoria Park on the island of Hong Kong – ostensibly out of fear of the spread of the corona virus. Many Hong Kong residents made a statement by putting lighted candles in the windows of their homes. Hundreds of people met near the park despite the ban, but were evicted by the police. On June 4, Chow Hang-tung, Vice President of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, was arrested but released on bail a day later. The Alliance is the main organizer of the annual vigil. Chow was accused of inciting an unauthorized gathering, which she rejected as absurd.
The major protest commemoration on the anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong to China on July 1 was also completely canceled by the government "for corona reasons" – as it did last year. This certainly also was to be understood against the background of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China on July 1st in Beijing, which contributes to an even greater sensitivity surrounding this date (*AsiaNews* June 4, 7; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* June 5; *Reuters* June 28; *UCAN* June 3; https://oldyosef.hkdavc.com/?p=1772).

June 24, 2021:

Last edition of the government-critical *Apple Daily*

In an article for *UCAN*, Benedict Rogers, co-founder and chief executive of Hong Kong Watch, described the forced shutdown of the popular and last remaining Chinese-language pro-democracy daily *Apple Daily* as "the death of press freedom" in Hong Kong. The million copies that were printed on the last day of publication were sold out within hours. With 600,000 paying subscribers and capital of over US $ 50 million, the newspaper could have been published for another 18 months, but the Hong Kong

government, in the person of Secretary of Security John Lee, froze the newspaper's bank accounts so that salaries could no longer be paid and arrested editor-in-chief Ryan Law and four other senior executives on June 17 following a major raid – under the Security Act, which came into force at the end of June last year, and on charges of colluding with foreign forces to undermine national security. Jimmy Lai, Catholic founder and proprietor of *Apple Daily*, was sentenced to 14 months in prison in April 2021 for organizing and participating in an unauthorized large-scale demonstration in 2019 (*UCAN* June 28).

June 25, 2021:

Vatican Foreign Minister comments on Hong Kong

At a Holy See press conference on June 25 to present the Day of Reflection and Prayer for Lebanon, which took place on 1 July in the Vatican, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, secretary for Relations with States, when asked by a journalist from *Epoch Times* what made the civil unrest in Lebanon different to the Holy See than the protest movement in Hong Kong, he replied: "Obviously Hong Kong is the object of concern for us. Lebanon is a place where we perceive that we can make a positive contribution. We do not perceive that in Hong Kong. One can say a lot of, shall we say, appropriate words that would be appreciated by the international press and by many parts of the world, but I – and, I think, many of my colleagues – have yet to be convinced that it would make any difference whatever. Here [in Lebanon] we have a chance, in Hong Kong we have a completely different situation." Archbishop Gallagher added: "We hope that the new bishop will also do a lot of good work" (*CNA* June 25).

Taiwan

June 19, 2021:

Bishop of Tainan resigns

The 54-year-old Bishop of Tainan, John Lee Juo-wang, was ordained a bishop on January 1, 2021. Now he is stepping down after less than six months in the episcopate. In a letter from the bishop published on the website of the Diocese of Tainan on June 19, 2021, he gives the reason that he developed "psychological and physical problems" "quite unexpectedly" soon after he took office. On May 7, he reported the facts to the Holy Father and offered to resign. On June 19, the Holy See announced that Pope Francis had accepted Bishop Lee's resignation and at the same time appointed the Bishop Emeritus of Tainan, Bosco Lin Chi-nan, as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Tainan (*UCAN* June 23; https://tainan.catholic.org.tw/110.06.19.jpg; see also *RCTC* 2021, No. 1, p. 16).

June 26, 2021:

Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation provides Covid-19 vaccines

President Tsai Ing-wen thanked Dharma Master Cheng Yen (證嚴) of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation via video on June 26, 2021 for the efforts to participate in vaccine procurement for the benefit of the government. The order is for 5 million doses of BioNTech. The government confirmed on July 10 that it had issued the Tzu Chi Foundation with the necessary documents to obtain the vaccination doses.

Previously, two Taiwanese companies, the technology group Foxconn and the largest semiconductor company in the world, TSMC, had already taken the initiative. The two companies have also received

the go-ahead from the government to donate five million doses of BioNTech vaccine each to their country. The deliveries of the vaccine produced in the EU should come directly from the German manufacturer. The sales partner is the Chinese group Fosun. Foxconn founder Terry Gou stated that the Chinese government had no influence on the current contract negotiations. Gou had previously accused Taiwan government of waiting too long to give permission given the urgent need. The affected party countered, however, that the securing of 5 million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech earlier this year was almost perfect, but Beijing interfered and caused the agreement to collapse. At the time, Taiwan did not want to import the vaccine through Fosun, the Chinese contract partner of BioNTech. There was concern that it might not be of the same quality. To date, Taiwan has received approximately 7 million doses of AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines from Japan, the United States, vaccine manufacturers and through the global vaccine-sharing initiative COVAX (COVID-19 Global Vaccine Access), government data shows, according to the *Taipei Times* on July 11. According to the *Taipei Times* on July 14, of the island's 23.5 million population, 15.93% had received at least one dose of vaccine. Former Vice President Chen Chien-jen (陳建仁), a recognized virologist and Catholic as well as former health minister, has high hopes for vaccination to prevent another mutation of the virus. By mid-May, the island had relatively few infections amid the global pandemic and enjoyed almost normal life with moderate precautions. Only the shortened quarantine regulation for pilots to five days, the gathering of older people in teahouses as well as cramped accommodation for guest workers in an electrical company made the emergence of sources of infection and an increase in cases possible. Rigid measures of danger level 3, but no lockdown, now ensure that the contagion gradually subsides, so that new freedoms for encounters should soon be possible again. Everyone is now waiting for the imminent arrival of the vaccine from the hands of the compassionate Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation as well as the donors Foxconn and TSMC (*ARD* July 12, 14; *Taipei Times* June 15, 30; July 11, 14).

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