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News update on religion and church in China October 1 – December 2, 2020

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News Update on Religion and Church in China October 1 – December 2, 2020

*Compiled by Katharina Feith, Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle)
and Katharina Wenzel-Teuber*

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 2020, No. 4, pp. 3-24) covered the period May 3 – October 4, 2020.

Politics and Society

November 4, 2020:

Global Times: China Facing the End of Birth Control?

“Chinese demographers believe lifting family planning will be a trend in the country’s population policy, and minority groups, including unmarried women and same-sex couples, are expected to be granted the same rights to raise children,” the pro-government *Global Times* wrote on November 4, 2020. The new five-year plan (2021–2025) has effectively brought to an end the rhetoric of “family planning” and for the first time speaks of “inclusiveness” with regard to birth policy, the *Global Times* continues. The new policy is primarily geared to measures to counteract the effects of a massively aging society. Since 2017, the number of annual births has continued to decrease, despite the abolition of the one-child policy and the introduction of the two-child policy which took effect in 2016. The *Global Times*, however, is also allowing other opinions to be expressed, thus Lu Jiehua, a sociology professor at Peking University, who said that adjusting and improving fertility policies is an important part of national strategy in the face of an aging population, but it remains unclear “how the policy can be adjusted during the next five years, and whether to implement the third-child policy, or even to completely lift the restriction” (*Global Times* Nov. 4; bpb.de Oct. 28).

Religious Studies

October 18, 2020:

Second forum on “Internet + Religious Public Opinion” deals with the topic of “Religion and Cyber Security”

In view of the significantly increased cyber activity of people during the corona pandemic, it is necessary and important to deal with the topics of the forum – said Zheng Xiaoguan 郑筱筠, the director of the Institute of World Religions (IWR) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), at the beginning of the conference. Zheng’s tenure as IWR director is fairly recent, she has been in this position since April 2019. She is a specialist in Theravada Buddhism and ethnic minority religions among other things. Zheng announced that the forum, led by Xi Jinping’s key thoughts on cybersecurity, would focus on religion and cybersecurity, research on religion on the Internet, Internet and artificial intelligence, and building a cyber community of common destiny.

The main lectures of the forum dealt with the topics “Cyberspace Security in the Age of Big Data and Governance [zhili 治理] of Religions,” “New Religions in the Age of Artificial Intelligence,” “Types and Characteristics of Religious Public Opinion and their Social Governance” and “Report on the Level of Use of the Internet + by Sites for Religious Activities across the Country – Using the Example of Buddhism.” The subsequent sub-forums covered topics such as “The Internet and the Building of Individual Religious Identities,” “Concepts and Methods of Global Internet Governance,” “An Investigation of the Influence of the WeChat Space on Relationships within Religious Interest Groups,” “New Internet Media and the Development of Christianity in Taiwan” or “Mediatization and Mediation: An Anthropological Study of the Relationship Between the Internet and the Sacred.”

The forum was organized by the Chinese Association for Religious Studies, the IWR, the CASS Research Center for Evil Cults and the Institute for Minority and Religious Studies of Fujian Province; it was carried out by the Research Office for Digital Humanistic Religion and Religious Public Opinion of the IWR (zytzb.gov.cn Oct. 21).

The Chinese concept “Internet + [Plus]” originally referred to the application of the Internet to industry and other economic areas. On the subject of religion and the Internet, see also the entry of November 30 / December 1, 2020 in the section “Catholic Church.”

Religious Policy

November 18, 2020:

Draft “Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel” published for solicitation of comments

Up to now, nationwide state legal norms for religious professionals of all religions only included the “Measures for Reporting Religious Personnel for the Record” and the “Measures for Reporting for the Record the Holding of Chief Posts at Sites for Religious Activities” (both in force since March 1, 2007; cf. German translation and comments in *China heute* 2007, No. 1-2, pp. 23-25, 31-33). The contents of these two 2007 documents, with various innovations, are incorporated in Chapters 3 and 4 of the new draft “Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel.”

The new draft legal norm upholds the principle that religious personnel, in order to be able to operate legally, have to be recognized as such by the [state-sanctioned] religious organizations according to

rules that these organizations determine [under the guidance of the authorities] and which have to be reported to the authorities for the record. However, the new document published by the National Religious Affairs Administration is of a much broader nature than the previous two documents. Chapter 1 contains the principle that religious personnel must be patriotic and law-abiding, support the leadership of the CPC and adhere to the principle of independence. Chapter 2 lists the rights and duties of religious personnel. The duties include resistance to illegal religious activities, extremist religious ideology and infiltration by foreign forces through religion. A long list of prohibited acts ranges from carrying out terrorist activities, interfering with the exercise of government functions (including education), arbitrarily accepting appointment to religious office by a foreign institution, carrying out religious activities outside of registered sites, to “dissemination of religion through charity, in schools [...] or other educational institutions, and other illegal missionary acts.” Chapter 5 “Supervision and Management” stipulates, among other things, that religious organizations must develop systems for the management, evaluation, reward and punishment of their religious personnel, archive information on the personnel and report it to the authorities, who create the corresponding digital databases. Inter-provincial activities of religious professionals require special approval. For sanctions in the event of violations, the document refers to §§ 65 and 73 of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs.” The deadline for submitting comments is December 17 (text of 宗教教职人员管理办法 [征求意见稿] available at www.moj.gov.cn/news/content/2020-11/18/zlk_3260133.html, English translation at www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/religious-professionals-draft).

November 18, 2020:

Draft of revised “Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Foreigners Within the Territory of the People’s Republic of China” published for solicitation of comments

The draft “Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Foreigners Within the Territory of the People’s Republic of China” (hereafter “Implementation Rules”) presented by the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) appear to be a new version of the document of the same name from 2000 (revised 2011). They are based on the still valid “Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Foreigners Within the Territory of the People’s Republic of China” from 1994 (official English translation at www.sara.gov.cn/flfg/316649.jhtml). On May 7, 2018, the NRAA had already published a draft for “Measures for the Administration of Collective Religious Activities of Foreigners Within the Territory of the People’s Republic of China” (see *RCTC* 2018, No. 3, pp. 6-7); this document, however, has not been enacted but appears to have been incorporated into Chapter 2 “Collective Religious Activities” of the new “Implementation Rules.”

Foreigners who carry out religious activities in China must comply with the laws of China and, among other things, respect the principle of the independence of the religions (§ 5). Foreigners are allowed to participate in religious activities in Chinese temples, mosques and churches (§ 6). Should they wish to carry out collective religious activities of their own, they will have to choose three “organizers” who have neither “anti-China words or deeds” nor “negative entries” and must not enjoy any kind of immunity in China (§ 8). These organizers apply with the religious organization of the respective religion on the city level for the use of a temple, mosque or church and sign a detailed usage contract with the respective temple, mosque or church (§ 9-10). Where this is not possible [for example because the religion in question (e.g. Judaism, Mormons, Baha’i) has no official counterpart in China], it is possible to apply with the authorities for the use of a temporary religious site; very detailed documents must be submitted for this, e.g. the personal details and

visas of all persons who will take part in the planned activities (§ 12-16). The religious activities of the foreigners should be presided over by the local Chinese clergy of the host site; if it is really necessary that religious activities be presided over by foreign clergy, this must be reported to the authorities (Section 11). Chinese people (excluding the Chinese clergy presiding over the religious activities) are not allowed to participate in collective religious activities of foreigners (Section 17). Foreigners are not allowed to appoint any religious personnel among Chinese citizens, nor are they allowed to do missionary work or conduct religious training among Chinese citizens (Section 21). Chapter 3 stipulates that “religious exchange” (including at the cultural and academic level) must be organized through the religious organizations at the national or provincial level (§ 22). It stipulates the conditions under which foreign religious clergy may preach at Chinese religious sites (§§ 23-24), or under which foreigners may bring religious literature into China, etc. Chapter 4 (Sections 30-36) provides impressive penalties for foreigners who violate the provisions, which are imposed either by the religious affairs departments or other competent authorities, for example by the state security authorities, for violations of the anti-espionage law. Penalties are also provided for Chinese religious groups or sites which violate the Implementation Rules, and for providing conditions for illegal religious activities by foreigners.

The deadline for the submission of comments is December 17. According to the party-affiliated *Global Times*, the new regulations are aimed at “preventing the infiltration of religious extremists” (text of the 中华人民共和国境内外国人宗教活动管理规定实施细则 [修订征求意见稿] at www.moj.gov.cn/news/content/2020-11/18/zlk_3260126.html, English translation at www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/foreign-religion-in-china; *AsiaNews* Nov. 25; *Global Times* Nov. 23).

Buddhism

November 17, 2020:

Radio Free Asia (RFA) reports the closure of the incense burners in front of the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa and the dismantling of prayer flags in many parts of Tibet

The US broadcaster reported that two incense burners in front of the Jokhang Temple used for Sang-Sol rituals – the burning of juniper branches and other smoke offerings – had been completely closed for the faithful. The authorities are said to have claimed that the indiscriminate burning of these offerings is harmful to the environment and pollutes the air, and have carried out a corresponding education campaign since the beginning of November. Earlier, an area had been fenced off in front of the Jokhang Temple in the course of renovation work to prevent believers from praying there publicly and performing their prostrations.

RFA also reports that the authorities in many parts of Tibet have ordered the destruction of prayer flags, something which – according to RFA – represents one of the “most direct assaults to date on visible symbols of Tibetan culture and religious belief.” According to one source, all prayer flags with mantras printed on them, old or new, have been removed in the name of “environmental clean-up” and “behavioral reform,” and even the poles from which they were hung have been torn down. According to a report by the Free Tibet organization, the removal of prayer flags began in March in the Golog (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province. In an April 11, 2020 report by the United Front Department (UFD) of Golog which can be found online, it is said that since March all 66 temples in the prefecture have participated in the “Green Temples and Monasteries” campaign. Among other things, the campaign was directed against the “chaotic hanging of prayer flags.” More than 5,900 monks and nuns removed tons of rubbish and “34 tons of broken, old prayer flags” in the vicinity of

the monasteries, the UFD report said. The “Green Temples and Monasteries” campaign also included “reducing the [financial] religious burdens” of the population as a means of fighting poverty. According to the report, the monasteries cooperated with the authorities in this campaign by “reducing 31 Dharma meetings in size, canceling 8 Dharma meetings, demolishing four ‘chaotic’ religious sites [i.e., sites without official approval] and assisting cadres at all levels to hold 117 meetings on policies and legal norms” (UFD Golog according to fjnet.com April 11; freetibet.org June 26; rfa.org June 17; Nov. 17).

December 1–2, 2020:

10th National Assembly of Representatives of Buddhism in China meets in Ningbo

The regular meeting of the highest body of official Buddhism was attended by 570 Buddhist delegates and 81 specially invited people from all over China. Master Yanjue on behalf of the 9th Board of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) presented the report on the work of the past 5 years. Yanjue, who was born in 1955 and was one of the vice-presidents in the previous term of office of the CBA’s governing board, has provisionally headed the board since the then president, Abbot Xuecheng, had been removed from office in August of 2018 following charges accusing him of sexual harassment of nuns (see *RCTC* 2018, No. 4, pp. 11-12). The 10th National Assembly elected Yanjue as president of the CBA. 33 vice-presidents and a secretary general, Liu Wei, were also elected. The statutes of the CBA were revised and a resolution passed. In his closing speech, Yanjue called for, among other things, the strengthening of the “self-cleansing powers” of the Buddhist circles and the development of a “humanistic Buddhist thinking” (*renjian fojiao sixiang* 人间佛教思想) (https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/2L0_4sEOZpPMgDfXKO_G4g).

Islam

November 19, 2020:

Uyghur Human Rights Project online seminar: Hundreds of imams in detention centers

Abduweli Ayup, a Norway-based employee of the International Cities of Refuge Network, said in the seminar that in May 2018, based on interviews with Uyghurs from Xinjiang, they had begun to compile a list of imams who had been arrested and interned in extra-legal camps in Xinjiang since 2017. In the last update in June 2020, this list contained 613 imprisoned imams. He also said that Uyghurs in Xinjiang are now afraid of dying because there is no one left to conduct a funeral service for them. Rachel Harris, an ethno-musicologist at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), pointed out in the seminar that female religious leaders have also been affected. Female religious leaders are extremely important in Uyghur society because they work in families with the women, lead the funerals of women, teach children to recite the Koran, etc., Harris said. She called for female religious leaders to be included in the investigations into the mass detentions and other rights violations in Xinjiang. The online seminar “Where are the Imams?” by the Washington-based Uyghur Human Rights Project is available online as a video (<https://uhrp.org/press-release/video-where-are-imams-evidence-mass-detention-uyghur-religious-figures.html>; *Radio Free Asia* Nov. 20).

December 1, 2020:

New state regulations for Chinese Muslims regarding the Hajj come into force

The “Measures for the Administration of Islamic Hajj Affairs” (伊斯兰教朝觐事务管理办法, hereinafter referred to as “Measures”) were promulgated by the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) and seven other authorities on August 27, 2020 and made public on October 12. They came into force on December 1. This is the most comprehensive piece of legislation to date regarding the pilgrimage of Muslims from the People’s Republic of China to Islam’s holy sites in Saudi Arabia.

Beginning in 1985, pilgrimages to Mecca were once again allowed for individuals paying their own way. Since the first version of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” came into force in 2005, only the Hajj organized by the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) has been legal. Since the summer of 2006, Saudi Arabia has only been issuing group pilgrimage visas for pilgrimages centrally organized by the CIA.

The new “Measures” of 2020 once again stipulate that no organization other than the CIA may organize the Hajj for Chinese citizens (§ 2) and that the NRAA is responsible for the “administration of Hajj affairs” (§ 3). The NRAA sets an annual quota of pilgrims for the whole country, which is then distributed among Muslims at lower levels. Muslim citizens wishing to go on the annual pilgrimage, who are patriotic, law-abiding, healthy and have sufficient financial means, can apply for participation in the Hajj. The CIA takes over the specific travel organization. Before leaving, pilgrims must attend training courses on political, religious and other subjects. During the trip outside of China (Chapter 5) the organizers have, among other duties, the task of preventing “infiltration by religious extremist thinking” (§ 35.2). Penalties are provided for “unauthorized organization of the Hajj of citizens or creating the conditions for illegal Hajj activities” (§ 40) (text of the new measures is available at www.sara.gov.cn/ywdt/344208.jhtml; aa.com.tr Oct.16; scmp.com Oct. 15; globaltimes.cn Oct.12).

According to the *Global Times*, more than 11,000 Muslims from the PRC took part in the centrally organized Hajj in 2018 and in 2019. Saudi Arabia canceled the 2020 Hajj for foreign pilgrims due to the corona pandemic. For background information on the new provisions, see the article in *China heute* 2020, No. 4, pp. 186-188 (in German).

Protestantism

October 12, 2020:

Online seminar “One Health – One World” by the Hamburg Mission Academy, Asia House Cologne and the China InfoDesk

The Mission Academy Hamburg, Asia House Cologne and China InfoDesk collaborated in producing the online event “One Health – One World,” at which people from Chinese civil society had their say in a discourse on the ethical implications of the corona pandemic. The keynote speech was given by Dr. Dietrich Werner, theological advisor at Bread for the World. He emphasized the deterioration in the global human rights and environmental situation and the urgent need for active cooperation. Prof. He Guanghu, of Beijing’s Renmin University, a philosopher, religious scholar and Christian, argued in favor of *agape* – all-embracing love, as the embodiment of divine law within human nature and transcending all of creation as the key to solving the dilemma between safeguarding rights of freedom and protection of life in the face of the pandemic. The third speaker was the environmental activist Wen Bo, who has made a name for himself with studies on marine pollution, on the problems of wildlife markets, incentives by the Chinese government to overcome poverty by breeding rare animals and the

negative consequences for the world of exploitation of nature. Yan Zihui, Program Director of YMCA Shanghai, reported on initiatives to promote environmental awareness and openness to interreligious community projects among young people, for example, in camps in Inner Mongolia, where trees are being planted to prevent desertification. The young people are intentionally recruited by Buddhist, Muslim and Christian organizations to participate together in these events. In the discussions that followed, everyone agreed that the health of people, animals and nature cannot be thought of separately, but rather forms a unit. A continuation of the dialogue is planned with a follow-up event on March 26, 2021. All speeches from the first dialogue can be found on the Mission Academies website: missionsakademie.de. A more complete version of He Guanghu's contribution can be found in *China heute* 2020, No. 4, pp. 201-205 (in German).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

October 13, 2020:

Legal proceedings begun against Pastor Zhao Huaiguo

Pastor Zhao Huaiguo, founder of the Bethel Church in Cili, a town near Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province, was taken into police custody on March 15, 2020 and officially arrested on April 2. The first trial began on October 13, when Zhao was charged with "inciting rebellion against the state." Zhao is accused of disseminating information about the spread of COVID-19 inside and outside of China, using software to bypass national internet controls and recommending it to others. The government believes that these acts represent a serious threat to national security. Pastor Zhao is said to have pleaded guilty as charged. He faces 18 months in prison.

Since the Bethel Church was founded in 2007, the congregation has been asked several times to join the official Protestant umbrella organizations, which they have consistently refused to do. A large-scale raid of the church took place in March 2019, during which furniture and sacred objects were destroyed and Bibles and other printed matter were confiscated (asianews.it Nov. 9; chinaaid.org Nov. 5).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

November 2, 2020:

Priests, Sisters and seminarians detained in Baoding

AsiaNews reported on November 6, citing Catholic sources in Hebei, that on the morning of November 2, two priests and more than a dozen seminarians and Sisters from the Baoding unofficial community were forcibly taken away by government officials. On the same day, Father Lu Genjun, former vicar general of the Baoding diocese, was also taken away. No one knows where any of them are being held, the report said.

Most of the Catholics in the Diocese of Baoding belong to the underground. Baoding underground Bishop Su Zhimin has been missing in police custody since 1997. His coadjutor Bishop An Shuxin joined the Patriotic Association in 2009 after being released from a long prison term and was officially installed as Ordinary (local bishop) in 2010 (*AsiaNews* Nov. 6).

November 2, 2020:

“Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed:” Remembrance of the dead in Catholic communities throughout China

All over China, Catholics remembered the deceased in the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, also known as “All Souls Day” (reports and photos: chinacatholic.org Nov. 2 and 3, 2020).



Women praying in a hillside cemetery in the Diocese of Wanzhou (Chongqing).



Mass in Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed in the cemetery of Ershisiqingdi, Diocese of Baotou (Inner Mongolia). There the faithful also mourned one of their priests who had died of COVID-19.

November 23, 2020:

Thomas Chen Tianhao ordained bishop of Qingdao (Shandong) with the approval of the government and the Pope – Bishops' elections in Pingliang and Wuhan

The principal consecrator was Bishop Fang Xingyao of Linyi (Shandong), who is also chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. Shandong Bishops Yang Yongqiang from Zhoucun and Zhang Xianwang from Jinan were the co-consecrators. 21 priests and 210 Sisters and members of the faithful took part in the ordination liturgy. According to the report posted on the website of the official Catholic governing bodies, Bishop Chen Tianhao was born in December 1962. He graduated from Shandong Holy Spirit Seminary in 1989 and was ordained a priest the same year; afterwards he worked in the Diocese of Qingdao in pastoral care. In 1998 he was appointed chairman of the Qingdao Patriotic Association (PA), and in 2010 a member of the Standing Committee of the PA at the national level. On November 19, 2019, he was elected candidate for the bishopric of Qingdao [according to the official Chinese procedure].



Consecration of Bishop Chen Tianhao in Qingdao. Photo taken from chinacatholic.org.

The official report does not mention details of the ordination liturgy, such as the reading of the appointment and the formula of the oath. At the first two episcopal ordinations after the conclusion of the provisional agreement – of the Bishops Yao Shun of Jining and Xu Hongwei of Hanzhong on August 26 and 28, 2019 – the appointment of the Chinese Bishops' Conference was read out with the new addition, "The Pope has already consented to this candidate" (see *RCTC* 2019, No. 4, pp. 15-16).

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said, according to a November 25 report on *Vatican News*, that he could confirm that Chen is "the third bishop appointed and ordained within the framework of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China." However, *AsiaNews* wrote that, according to some experts, this was the first episcopal ordination under the terms of the

provisional agreement. *AsiaNews* does not actually count Bishops Yao Shun and Xu Hongwei as “fruits” of the agreement, since the Holy Father appointed them years ago.

Hong Kong journalist Lucia Cheung reported on her blog on November 16 that there were two more bishops’ elections conducted locally according to the official Chinese procedure. In the Diocese of Pingliang (Gansu), Father Li Hui was elected around July 2020 and in the Diocese of Wuhan (Hubei) before the national holiday on October 1, 2020, Father Cui Qingqi was elected as a candidate for a bishopric, Cheung said. According to her, these two candidates were neither wanted by the Holy See nor appointed in advance by the Pope, which is why they were the first real test cases for the agreement. She thinks it likely that the Vatican finally accepted the candidates so as not to jeopardize the extension of the agreement. There are no other media reports on these elections, only blogger Shan Ren Shen Fu mentions them in a comment in *AsiaNews* (asianews.it Oct. 26; chinacatholic.cn Nov. 23; vaticannews.va Nov. 25; <https://medium.com/@luciacheungoffice/口頭照會方式延續的中梵協議告訴我們甚麼-55b31d824ade>).

November 30 / December 1, 2020:

Catholic governing bodies commemorate the “Guangyuan Manifesto” of 70 years ago, discuss plans for 2021 and Internet work

On November 30, 1950, Father Wang Liangzuo in Guangyuan (Sichuan Province) published a statement calling for a break with all imperialist powers and a self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating Church. The Chinese government promoted the dissemination of the manifesto and used it as a vehicle to promote the separation of the Chinese Church from the universal Church. Seventy years later, around 120 people attended the memorial event in Guangyuan organized by the Catholic national governing bodies “One Association and One Conference,” i.e. Patriotic Association (PA) and Bishops’ Conference. In addition to Church representatives, representatives of the United Front Department of the CPC, of the religious affairs department of the province and other party representatives were also present. Bishop Fang Xingyao, chairman of the Patriotic Association, said in his speech that the current period is the best in the history of Chinese Catholicism. Catholic circles of the country should, full of gratitude, lead the clergy and the faithful to continue to follow the footsteps of their patriotic predecessors, to study the spirit of the 5th Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CPC and to adhere “unshakably to the principle of independence, autonomy and self-administration.” In Xiaosishan, Guangyuan, those attending the memorial event laid flowers for Wang Liangzuo and visited the “National Religious Patriotism Education Base” and the “Catholic Patriotic Deeds Exhibition Hall.”

According to the official reports, the principle of independence also ran through the following day’s meetings. At the 5th meeting of the 9th Standing Committee of “One Association and One Conference” on the morning of December 1, the work report of the Catholic governing bodies for 2020 and the plans for 2021 were presented. Bishop Ma Yinglin mentioned in the work report that the election and ordination and the “transformation” [from underground to the official Church] of bishops had been promoted, among other things. The report of the meeting on the website of the official Catholic governing bodies consists mainly of party and religious policy slogans and phrases. In the afternoon, there was a “Conference on Chinese Catholic Information Network Work.” A work report with the title “Grasp the information network work to tell the Chinese Catholic story well” was presented (chinacatholic.cn Dec. 1 [3 reports]).

Sino-Vatican Relations

October 22, 2020:

The provisional agreement between the Holy See and the PRC extended for a two-year trial period

In a communiqué from its Press Office on October 22, the Holy See announced that the two sides had “agreed to extend the experimental implementation phase of the Provisional Agreement for another two years.” The Holy See “considers the initial application of the Agreement – which is of great ecclesiastical and pastoral value – to have been positive, thanks to the good communication and cooperation between the Parties on the matters agreed upon, and intends to pursue an open and constructive dialogue for the benefit of the life of the Catholic Church and the good of Chinese people.”

On the Chinese side, an extremely low key announcement was made on the same day by a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, who, when asked at the Foreign Ministry’s regular press conference, said: “After friendly negotiations with the Vatican, China on October 22, 2020 decided to extend the interim agreement regarding the appointment of bishops for two years.” He also announced a continuation of the close communication and consultation between the two sides.

The Vatican newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano* published a lengthy explanation of the aim of the agreement on October 22. It states that, through the exchange of verbal notes, the agreement was extended until October 22, 2022 (*Bollettino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede* Oct. 22: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/10/22/0542/01260.html>; www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1825951.shtml; www.osservatoreromano.va/it/news/2020-10/proroga-dell-accordo-provvisorio-tra-la-santa-sede-e-la-repubb.html). For more details see the article in *China heute* 2020, No. 4, pp. 184-186 (in German).

Nov. 23/24, 2020:

In his new book, Pope Francis for the first time mentions the Uyghurs as a “persecuted people” – a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman rejects this claim

In his new book *Let Us Dream: The Path to A Better Future* the Pope wrote: “I think often of persecuted peoples: the Rohingya, the poor Uyghurs, the Yazidi – what ISIS did to them was truly cruel – or Christians in Egypt and Pakistan killed by bombs that went off while they prayed in church.” Previously, Pope Francis had already spoken out on the persecution of the Rohingya and Yazidis, but not on the situation of the Uyghurs and the re-education camps in Xinjiang. Commentators have often seen the reason for this in the Vatican’s negotiations with China, according to *Reuters* on November 23.

According to *Reuters*, Zhao Lijian, spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, denied the Pope’s statement at a press conference on November 24: “The Chinese government has always protected the legal rights of all ethnic minorities equally,” said Zhao. “People of all ethnicities in Xinjiang enjoy full protection of their subsistence rights, development rights and freedom of religion,” Zhao said. “The remarks by Pope Francis are unfounded.”

The English edition of the Holy Father’s book appeared on December 1. Journalists received advance copies (*AsiaNews* Nov. 24; *LICAS* Nov. 25; *Reuters* Nov. 23, 24; *UCAN / CNS* Nov. 24).

Hong Kong

October 1, 2020:

40th Anniversary of the Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong

October 1, 2020 marked the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Holy Spirit Study Centre, which was established by Cardinal John Baptist Wu and the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong as a bridge between the then revived Catholic Church in China and the Universal Church. The Catholics of Hong Kong were also to be made more aware of the situation of the Church on the Chinese mainland. Right from the start, the centre has collected and published documentation material – including the Chinese-English language magazine *Tripod* and many book publications – as well as conducted research and active dialogue with Catholics in mainland China. In 1980, Bishop Wu handed over the leadership to Father John Tong (the current Apostolic Administrator of the diocese, Bishop of Hong Kong from 2009–2017 and Cardinal since 2012), who is still the director of the centre today. In addition to lay people, many members of religious orders have worked in the Holy Spirit Study Centre over the years, above all Maryknoll Missionaries from the USA, PIME (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions) Fathers from Milan, Missions Etrangères de Paris and Scheutfield Missionaries from Belgium.

The centre has brokered many aid projects, organized and accompanied visits to the Church in China, received countless visitors from the mainland and held conferences and training courses for Chinese Catholics from the mainland in Hong Kong. In the future, according to Fr. Sergio Ticozzi PIME, who has been working there for many years, the centre wants to focus more on academic activities, in close cooperation with the Holy Spirit Seminary College, and hopes to later become its own research institute, specific to the Catholic Church in China. The cooperation with academics from the mainland is to be intensified (*AsiaNews* Dec. 3; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Nov. 27; Roman Malek [ed.], *Hongkong: Kirche und Gesellschaft im Übergang*, Sankt Augustin – Nettetal 1997, pp. 225-232).

October 3, 2020:

Hong Kong Theological Seminary and College celebrate anniversaries

October 3, 2020, signaled the beginning of a full year of celebrations marking the 90th anniversary of the Holy Spirit Seminary and the 50th anniversary of the Holy Spirit Seminary College of Theology and Philosophy in Aberdeen. The anniversaries will include Masses, prayer meetings, experience reports on Facebook and an “Open House Day.” They will end on the weekend of October 2-3, 2021. They opened on October 3 with a prayer service presided over by Cardinal John Tong, Apostolic Administrator of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing OFM, Rector of the Holy Spirit Seminary, and Fr. Robert Ng Chi-fun SJ, Director of the Seminary College. They planted a “*Delonix Regia*” or “Flame Tree” (“*Royal Poinsettia*,” “*Flamboyant*”), which symbolizes the generations-deep roots of the faith in Hong Kong and will bloom in May when the annual final exams take place.

The beginnings of the Holy Spirit Seminary date back to 1924, when Archbishop Celso Costantini, the first nuncio of the Holy See to China, convened the first Chinese National Synod (episcopal conference) in Shanghai and established 14 regional seminaries in the country, including in Hong Kong. The then South China Regional Seminary was founded in Aberdeen in 1930 and began operations a year later. It was directly under the Holy See’s Propaganda Fide (now the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples) and was initially run by Irish Jesuits. The seminary played an important role in the development of the Chinese Catholic Church, especially in the second half of the 20th century. Accord-

ing to the *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner*, due to political turmoil in China, the Regional Seminary in Hong Kong accepted large numbers of seminarians from mainland China, some of whom later became bishops. In 1964 the seminary passed into the hands of the Hong Kong Diocese and was renamed the Holy Spirit Seminary. In 1970 the Holy Spirit Seminary College of Theology and Philosophy was established with the collaboration of the dioceses of Hong Kong and Macau, the Jesuits and the Salesians of Don Bosco. In 1985 the Franciscan Friars also joined the team. In 1973 lay people were also admitted to study at the College and today make up the majority of the students. Between 1974 and 1976 the theological and philosophical departments were affiliated with the Pontifical Urban University in Rome (the Urbaniana), so that recognized degrees can now be acquired. In 1989, an additional religious studies institute was created, the Higher Institute of Religious Sciences, at which papal degrees can also be obtained (*AsiaNews* Oct. 12; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Oct. 7).

October 18, 2020:

Anglicans in Hong Kong elect new Archbishop

In a special session of the 8th General Synod of the Anglican Church in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui), Rev. Andrew Chan Au-ming, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of West Kowloon since 2012, was elected as the successor to the retiring Archbishop Paul Kwong. Other candidates were Timothy Kwok Chi-pei, Bishop of East Kowloon Diocese, and Rev. Matthias Derr, Episcopal Adviser to Hong Kong Island Diocese. Bishop Chan is considered a mild-mannered churchman without demonstrative political positions. He completed his theological training in Great Britain. In 1991 he was ordained a deacon and a year later a priest. In 2004 he received his Master's Degree in Theology from the University of London. In 2005 he was appointed Dean of St. John's Cathedral in Hong Kong. Chan is married and has one son.

In June of last year, at the beginning of the demonstrations against the security law, he signed a pastoral letter together with the Anglican Archbishop Kwong and his colleague Kwok, in which the city administration was denounced for its stubbornness in not listening to the voice of the people and thus fueling the riots. When there were violent attacks by protesters later, the three churchmen expressed their disapproval.

Bishop Chan is expected to be inducted into his new office on January 3, 2021 (*South China Morning Post* Oct. 18).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoDesk

November 11 / December 2, 2020:

Hong Kong: Prison sentences for young opposition activists and other restrictions under the Security Law

Three of the – also internationally – best known young democracy activists in Hong Kong, Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow and Ivan Lam, were sentenced to thirteen and a half, ten and seven months in prison at the beginning of December. All three on the first day of their trial pleaded guilty to having been part of the organization of a non-authorized rally in front of the Hong Kong Police Headquarters in June last year. However, as they said, they did not take part in violent riots, but demonstrated peacefully. This is Wong's third prison sentence. The now 24-year-old began organizing protests while he was still a schoolboy.

Since the Security Law came into force, action against opposition members has become increasingly tough. After four Democratic MPs were expelled from the Hong Kong Legislative Council on instruc-

tions from Beijing – they were accused of undermining Hong Kong’s security and not recognizing China’s sovereignty over Hong Kong – the remaining 15 pro-democracy LegCo Members resigned on November 11. Thus, there is no longer any opposition party in parliament. Ruth Kirchner reports on *Deutschlandfunk*: “Pro-democratic local politicians who celebrated a landslide election victory a year ago are now afraid that they will be the next to be overthrown. At the same time, many independent media are under massive pressure; in schools, textbooks are being changed, content critical of China is being removed, school subjects are being redesigned – in order to force a more ‘China-friendly way of thinking.’” As the *South China Morning Post* reported, the Hong Kong police have also activated a hotline about possible dangers so that the residents can report what they see as threats to national security (*AsiaNews* Nov. 11; *Deutschlandfunk* Dec. 2; *Die Rheinpfalz* Nov. 11; *South China Morning Post* Oct. 28; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* Dec. 2).

Taiwan

October 7–8, 2020:

Embassy of Taiwan to the Holy See supports people in need in Rome

Instead of holding its usual reception on October 10 to mark Taiwan’s national holiday, this year the Taiwanese embassy dedicated itself to the service of people in need in Rome in response to the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. In collaboration with His Holiness’ Alms Giver, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, Caritas Rome and the charitable Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, homeless and socially neglected people were treated to a Taiwanese-style lunch. In addition, Taiwanese-made sleeping bags were distributed to the homeless and Caritas, and the Tzu Chi Foundation distributed tins of tuna and blankets made of recycled plastic. Ambassador Matthew S.M. Lee personally participated in distributing the food.

Since the outbreak of the Corona pandemic in Italy, the Taiwanese embassy has supplied various Vatican institutions, religious orders and Catholic hospitals with face masks and protective clothing made in Taiwan (*AsiaNews* Oct. 9).

November 14, 2020:

Taiwan: Fr. John Lee Juo-wang appointed Bishop of Tainan

Pope Francis appointed the previous Vicar General of the Diocese of Tainan, John Lee Juo-Wang, as the new bishop. He will succeed Bishop Bosco Lin Chi-nan, who submitted his resignation for reasons of age. Lee Juo-Wang was born on November 2, 1966, the ninth child in a large family that put him up for adoption into a Catholic family. There he came into contact with the faith. After training with the Salesians and the Tainan Seminary, he was ordained a priest in 1993. He graduated from the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome with a licentiate in dogmatic theology. Since 2019 he has held the office of Vicar General. Lee Juo-Wang has made a great contribution to youth and vocational work.

The Diocese of Tainan, one of the seven dioceses of Taiwan, has 7,500 Catholics out of a population of 2 million (*AsiaNews* Nov. 16).

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