

News Update on Religion and Church in China June 17 – October 25, 2021

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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. 3, pp. 3-19) covered the period March 16 – July 6, 2021.

General – Politics

July 17–31, 2021:

Flood disaster in Henan

Due to the heavy rains that fell in the Province of Henan in July, with an average rainfall of 449 liters per square meter, catastrophic flood damage has occurred there. Church organizations such as Jinde Charities and the Amity Foundation have participated in the rescue and relief efforts with many volunteers delivering urgently needed donations in kind. Churches and other buildings of Christian communities also suffered great damage (amityfoundation.org Aug 12; www.jinde.org/Project/show/id/5163.html; xinhuanet.com Jul 21). – For more information, see *China heute* 2021, No. 3, pp. 139-141 (in German).

July 21, 2021:

Ministry of Education publishes plan on “children’s language homophony” (*tongyu tongyin* 童语同音): Kindergartens in ethnic areas must use Chinese beginning in September

The circular refers to a directive from Xi Jinping that education in the national common language (i.e. standard Chinese, *putonghua*) “must start from the baby.” In this way, the basis for lifelong development will be laid, which will also help to consolidate the “sense of community of the Chinese nation,” the circular said. Specifically, from September 2021, all kindergartens in ethnic areas and rural (dialect) areas are to use the national common language in the care and education of children. The pre-school staff is to be trained for this gradually. Standard Chinese should be integrated into the everyday life and games of the kindergartens in such a way that the children are encouraged to use it in conversation with adults and each other. Sponsorships between kindergartens in the east and west

of China are to be formed. Experiences with the model “one village, one kindergarten” in the Province of Sichuan are to be further evaluated. The text of the circular is to be found at www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2021-08/02/content_5629074.htm, English translation at <https://bitterwinter.org/the-new-preschool-directive-cultural-genocide-now-starts-in-kindergarten>.

As the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Dharamsala reported, citing Chinese media, Sichuan province so far has established 4,884 “one village, one kindergarten” preschool education centers and trained 16,000 Mandarin counsellors, enabling 278,800 minority children to learn Mandarin before school. Sichuan has three Tibetan autonomous prefectures, covering more than half of the area of the province.

Kindergartens in Inner Mongolia are also affected by the new directive. There were protests there as early as 2020 because of the abolition of Mongolian as the language of instruction in schools (see *RCTC* 2020, No. 4, p. 4). According to U.S. broadcaster *Radio Free Asia* (*RFA*), the government in northeast China, where around 2.3 million Koreans live, has also introduced curriculum changes that will gradually phase out Korean-language instruction in schools. At least one county in Xinjiang no longer offers Uyghur-language instruction despite a majority Uyghur population, according to *RFA*. Individuals quoted in the reports saw this development as a violation of the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy (*rfa.org* Aug. 11; *tchrd.org* Sept. 17).

July 24, 2021:

Central Committee and State Council issue guidelines to reduce the burden of homework and extracurricular training on pupils in compulsory education

As is well known, the pressure on China’s students in the competition for good schools is enormous. According to the new guidelines, the quality of teaching and after-class care in schools should be improved to such an extent that additional training (tutoring) outside school will no longer be necessary for the future and the financial burden on families will be significantly reduced. The problem of large differences in the level of education in schools, especially between town and country, is also to be tackled and the system of entrance examinations for senior middle school is to be reformed. The time required for written homework is limited to 60 minutes (elementary school) or 90 minutes (middle school), the guidelines say. At the same time, they announce massive steps against the lucrative tutoring market. Existing institutions that offer instruction in compulsory school subjects outside school must register as non-profit organizations and are not allowed to generate capital via the stock exchange. Tutors may not use foreign teaching material; in addition, lessons are prohibited on public holidays and during the holidays, as well as for preschool children. According to *Forbes*, the three largest Chinese education companies lost US\$ 16 billion in market value within an hour, after investors sold off shares following a leak of the new policy.

Probably one goal of the new policy is to increase the birth rate, as many couples do not want to have more than one child because of the high cost of education. However, it is also about control of the teaching content: According to “Methods for the Administration of Out-of-School Teaching Material for Primary and Secondary School Pupils,” issued by the Ministry of Education on August 25, in addition to things like “denigration of the party” and “falsification of the party history,” also the “dissemination of religious doctrines, religious teachings, religious regulations as well as cults and feudal superstitious thinking” are prohibited (关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的意见 at www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-07/24/content_5627132.htm; 中小学生校外培训材料管理办法 [试行] at www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A29/202109/t20210902_558022.html; *Forbes* July 24; *Bloomberg News* July 25).

August 27–28, 2021:

Central conference on ethnic work: Xi Jinping emphasizes strengthening the “sense of community of the Chinese nation”

According to Communist Party Secretary General Xi Jinping, forging a “sense of community of the Chinese nation” (中华民族共同体意识) is the main line of the Party’s ethnic policy, without which the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation cannot be achieved. All ethnic groups should identify closely with the great fatherland, the Chinese nation and culture, the CCP, and socialism with Chinese characteristics. The equality of all ethnicities and the autonomous administration of ethnic areas must be maintained while ensuring the unhindered enforcement of government decrees from the party’s central committee. Xi called for further dissemination of the “national common language and script” (i.e., Standard Chinese), with “scientific protection” of the languages and scripts of all ethnicities, and for further purging of the “ideological poisons of separatism and religious extremism” (see official summaries of Xi Jinping’s speech at www.sara.gov.cn/zsjyw/360320.jhtml and www.news.cn/english/2021-08/28/c_1310154568.htm).

Xi had previously stressed the need for a sense of community of the Chinese nation. Researchers interviewed by *Radio Free Asia* expressed concern that after Xi’s speech, the forced assimilation process of ethnicities would be further accelerated (*RFA* Sept. 7).

For the enforcement of Standard Chinese in preschool education in ethnic areas and in Tibetan Buddhist education, see the entry above of July 21, 2021, and the entry of “From September 27, 2021” in the section “Buddhism.”

October 2–7, 2021:

Widespread flooding in Shanxi

In October, extremely heavy rainfall and a subsequent dam burst produced widespread flooding and landslides in Shanxi Province, causing catastrophic damage, including damage to church buildings. Christian organizations such as Jinde Charities and the Amity Foundation were very active in the rescue and relief efforts (amityfoundation.org Oct. 11; xinde.org Oct. 10). – For more information, see also *China heute* 2021, No. 3, pp. 139-141 (in German).

October 23, 2021:

“Family Education Promotion Law” passed

The fundamental task of family education – meaning the education of minors by parents or guardians – is to “consolidate morality and educate people [立德树人], to cultivate and practice the core socialist values, to spread the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture, and to promote the healthy development of minors” – according to the new law (Article 3). The personal dignity of minors must be respected (Article 5.2). The guidelines for the content of family education (Article 16), “teaching minors to love the party, the country, the people, the collective and socialism” and “forging a sense of community of the Chinese nation” rank first – even before the education to kindness, honesty and helpfulness or healthy physical and psychological development. Special mention is made of “healthy use of the Internet” as well as protection against bullying and abuse. The use of violence in the family is prohibited (Article 23). Possibly with a view to the many children “left behind” in rural areas or left to the care of grandparents, it is pointed out that parents should “raise their children personally” and, if they entrust others with the care, remain in regular

contact with them and the children (Articles 17.1, 21). Family education, school education and social education should be closely coordinated; the education authorities and women's associations should set up a nationwide "family-school-society collaborative education mechanism" in urban and rural areas (Articles 5.4, 6.2). If residents' committees, women's associations, kindergartens and schools, etc. find that parents are not fulfilling their duties, they should criticize and educate them and, if necessary, ensure that they receive guidance on family education (Article 48). The All-China Women's Federation commented that the law had elevated education in the family from a traditional "family matter" to an important "matter of state" in the new era.

In view of the increase in bans on the religious activity of minors in many parts of China, it should be noted that the law makes no mention of the separation of education and religion, nor does it prohibit religious education in the family; the term "religion" does not appear in the text. It is also interesting that the state encourages "companies, institutional units, social organizations and individuals" to carry out "activities of charitable services for family education" (Article 10). It also encourages natural persons and organizations with and without the status of a legal person to donate to matters of family education or to provide voluntary services; they may also establish non-profit service facilities for family education (Articles 12, 36.1). It is to be hoped that this will continue to apply to religious institutions as well. For example, the Diocese of Fenyang established a family services center in 2013 (see *RCTC* 2013, No. 4, p. 10).

The law enters into force on January 1, 2022 (English translation and Chinese original can be found at www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/family-education-law/; cnwomen.com.cn Oct. 24; *Reuters* Oct. 18).

Religious Policy

August 13, 2021:

***China Christian Daily* reports further local reward systems for reporting "illegal" religious activities in Heilongjiang and Shandong**

The United Front Work Department of the Meilisi District of the Daur Nationality in Qiqihar announced such a reward system on August 9, the *China Christian Daily* reported. According to the article, citizens who report unregistered religious personnel as well as unauthorized trans-regional religious activities, the dissemination of religious information materials outside religious sites, unauthorized donations or private house meetings to the authorities can earn between 500 and 1,000 RMB. RMB 1,000 is also the reward for providing evidence of illegal religious infiltration. Similar reward systems were established in the Boshan District of Zibo on August 10 and in Weihai on August 8, both in Shandong Province. The latter stated that unauthorized religious training and summer or winter camps attended by minors, or any evangelical activity for "parenting purposes," should be reported. According to *China Christian Daily*, there are already financial incentives for such reporting from some local governments in Fujian, Guangxi, Henan, Hebei and Liaoning (*China Christian Daily* Aug. 13). – See also the reports on reward systems established in 2019 in Guangzhou and Xingtai in *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, p. 6; No. 4, p. 6.

Mid-October 2021:

Apple forced to remove Bible and Qur'an apps from its app store in China

Under pressure from the Chinese government, the US technology group Apple has removed two apps with religious content from its app store accessible in China. They are the Bible app from the US-based provider Olive Tree and the Qur'an Majeed app produced in Pakistan. According to Apple's report to the *BBC*, the background is the accusation by Chinese authorities of violating the prevailing laws and illegally distributing religious texts. The online distribution of Chinese Bible apps has already been massively impaired since mid-2019 (cf. *RCTC* 2019, No. 4, p. 10). In recent months, there have been increasing reports of bans and blockades of Christian Chinese communication forums in the social medium WeChat (*UCAN* Oct. 22).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Religious Studies

August 15, 2021:

Change in the leadership of the Chinese Association of Religious Studies

The head of the Institute of World Religions (IWR) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Zheng Xiaoyun 郑筱筠, who has been in office since 2019, has now also been elected president of the Chinese Association of Religious Studies 中国宗教学会. Zheng Xiaoyun is an expert on Theravada Buddhism and religions of ethnic minorities. The previous president, Zhuo Xinping, became honorary chairman. The new secretary general is Tang Xiaofeng, head of the IWR's department of Protestantism. The 14 vice-presidents are mostly representatives of religious studies, but also of politics and religions (including Bishop Guo Jincai and Pastor Kan Baoping). The Chinese Association for Religious Studies, founded in 1979, is a scientific mass organization of religious researchers based in the IWR, according to the IWR website. Among other things, it appears as a co-organizer of conferences. The next day (August 16) it organized a conference on "Marxist religious studies" together with the IWR (*iwr.cass.cn* Aug. 17, 20).

Daoism

July 20, 2021:

Overseas Liaison Commission of the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) meets in Wuyi

Li Guangfu, president of the CDA, said at the meeting that the Sinicization of Daoism must continue to be observed in foreign contact work. According to Li, the world must be even more actively approached, and the story of Chinese Daoism must be told well. The exchange should also exemplify the successes and "progressive experiences" of other civilizations to advance Daoism's own renewal and increase its adaptability to today's society, Li said, according to a report on the CDA's website. A five-year plan for the Commission's work was also presented at the meeting (*taoist.org.cn* July 20).

July 2021:

Online conference on the culture of the City God faith in China and Southeast Asia

The Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) and the Singapore Taoist Federation were co-organizers of the conference, which took place in Wuyi (Zhejiang) and online. In addition to executives of the organizers, representatives of Daoist associations from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines also participated. Before the start of the conference, auspicious rituals were performed simultaneously in the City God Temple of Wuyi and in the Koo Chye Ba City God Temple in Singapore. CDA President Li Guangfu said at the opening of the conference that many concepts of the City God faith – punishing evil and promoting good, as well as protecting fairness and justice in society – are also beneficial to people today and to the goal of world peace. CDA Vice President Zhang Gaocheng pointed out in his contribution that the City God culture is a traditional culture with national cohesion that had been brought to many places around the world by overseas Chinese [i.e., Chinese emigrants] (taoist.org.cn July 21).

Buddhism

July 2, 14, 2021:

Jilin: Buddhist monastery donates a total of 600,000 yuan for Catholic bishop's house and seminary

Since the Catholic bishop's house of the Diocese of Jilin, built in 1898, is no longer usable due to dilapidation, Zhengxing, president of the Buddhist Association of Jilin and abbot of Dafosi Monastery in Changchun, and the Dafosi monastic community decided to donate 500,000 RMB to the bishop's house. The donation was handed over on July 2. On July 14, the monastery donated another 100,000 RMB for the running costs of the seminary of the diocese. At the same time, Master Jingmiao, secretary general of the Buddhist Association of Jilin, was appointed as a visiting professor at the Catholic seminary. This was reported by the Catholic website *Xinde* and the Buddhist website *fjnet.com*. The donations were handed over at the "Religious Organizations Service Center of Jilin Province" – apparently a governmental institution – with the participation of high-ranking representatives of the religious affairs department of the province. Master Zhengxin said on July 2 that for many years, the Buddhist and Catholic communities in Jilin Province have been supporting each other in their work and building bridges of friendship (*xinde.org* July 14; *fjnet.com* July 2, 14).

July 6, 2021:

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports extremely high prison sentences for four monks from Tengdro Monastery

In September of 2020, according to a report published by Human Rights Watch on July 6, 2021, four monks from Tengdro Monastery in Tingri/Dingri County (Tibet Autonomous Region) were sentenced by the Shigatse Intermediate People's Court to the following prison terms on unknown charges: Choegyal Wangpo to 20 years; Lobsang Jinpa to 19 years; Norbu Dondrub to 17 years; and Ngawang Yeshe to 5 years in prison. Choegyal Wangpo, the head of the monastery, had left his mobile phone in a café in Lhasa in 2019, from which his contacts with exiled Tibetans from Tingri in Nepal were discovered. As a

result, the authorities carried out a raid on the monastery and village, in which 20 people were arrested; one monk subsequently committed suicide, according to HRW (hrw.org July 6).

August 7, 2021:

Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) adopts five-year plan to Sinicize Theravada Buddhism

The meeting of the CBA's Commission for Theravada Buddhism Work took place in Xishuangbanna (Yunnan). Due to the participation of the President of the CBA, Master Yanjue, and representatives of the Central United Front Department of the CCP, the meeting was attended by high-ranking participants. President Yanjue pointed out in his speech that the CBA has always attached great importance to work on Theravada Buddhism and has striven to promote exchanges between the three major language families of Buddhism [i.e. Chinese, Tibetan, Pali] and to strengthen the unity of Buddhists of all ethnicities. The "Plan for a Teaching System of the Academies for Higher Buddhist Studies of Chinese Pali-language Buddhism" was discussed and a five-year plan for the Sinicization of Theravada Buddhism (2021–2025) was adopted (chinabuddhism.com.cn July 12.).

Theravada Buddhism, which is widespread in countries of South and Southeast Asia, is native to China only in the southwestern province of Yunnan, where it has 1,705 registered religious sites, according to the database of the National Religious Affairs Administration.

August 22 to September 3, 2021:

121 Tibetans detained during search for photos of the Dalai Lama in Dza Wonpo

According to tibet.net, the website of the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala, the Chinese authorities carried out house searches in Dza Wonpo (Sershul/Shiqing County, Kardze/Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan), looking for pictures of the Dalai Lama and checking mobile phones for contacts with exiled Tibetans. Between August 22 and September 3, at least 121 Tibetans, both monks of the local monastery and lay persons, were detained, according to tibet.net. *Radio Free Asia* spoke of over 100 detained and dates the start of the searches to August 25. At the end of September, according to tibet.net, after almost a month of political re-education, all Tibetans except three monks were released. According to *RFA*, earlier this year, Dza Wonpo held meetings where Tibetans had to sign documents in which they pledged not to possess or distribute images of the Dalai Lama. According to tibet.net, many of the detained Tibetans were members of a local group promoting the Tibetan language (rfa.org Aug. 27; Sept. 1; tibet.net Sept. 7; Oct. 1).

From September 27, 2021:

Conference on Chinese-language curriculum for Tibetan Buddhist Studies in Qinghai

The conference was dedicated to the "establishment of a teaching program for Buddhist studies in the national common language" (i.e., in Standard Chinese), which in the future is to be used at all academies of Tibetan Buddhism. The popularization of the "national common language" is an indispensable prerequisite for "forging a sense of community of the Chinese nation" and a concrete initiative for the

Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism – said Sita, deputy office head of the Central Coordination Group for Tibet Work, at the conference. The detailed report of the official *Qinghai Daily* on the conference does not indicate whether the Chinese-language teaching program is meant to completely replace Tibetan-language Buddhist studies in the long term. Liu Peng, vice-rector of the Chinese Academy for Advanced Studies of Tibetan Buddhism, spoke at the conference, according to *Qinghai Daily*, of a “language switching to the national language.” A textbook “Buddhist Chinese” and a “Basic Course Chinese Language for Academies of Tibetan Buddhism” were discussed. The three-day conference, attended by over 500 people, was held at the Qinghai Academy of Tibetan Buddhism in Xining.

According to *Radio Free Asia (RFA)*, which cited Tibetan sources, government officials at the conference said monks and nuns must also learn to speak Chinese to each other. It is unclear whether the many thousands of classical Buddhist books written in Tibetan will gradually have to be translated into Chinese. Chinese cannot convey the full meaning of these texts, said Geshe Lhakdor, head of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, according to *RFA*, and he also wondered who should do these translations. “This policy is just an ignorant power play by the Chinese government,” he told *RFA* (*Qinghai Daily* as found at chinabuddhism.cn Sept. 30; zytzb.gov.cn Sept. 30; rfa.org Oct. 5).

On the current ethnic policy, see the entry of August 27-28, 2021, on the enforcement of Standard Chinese in preschool education see the entry of July 21, 2021, both of which can be found in the section “General – Politics.”

October 12, 2021:

Buddhists in Xishuangbanna stage “reasonable release of living beings” in Langcangjiang/Mekong to convey good wishes to the UN Biodiversity Conference

Under the supervision of the local fisheries authority, which tested the quality of the juvenile fish, 100,000 carp, a native fish species, were released in the river. This was intended to improve the ecosystem of the Langcang River and to encourage the population to actively participate in the protection of the river – according to a report on the action. The release of living beings is a Buddhist tradition. The action was carried out by the Buddhist Association of Xishuangbanna together with local temples and the local Foundation for Cultural Exchange of Theravada Buddhism (chinabuddhism.com.cn Oct. 140.).

The Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province borders Myanmar and Laos. Southeast Asian countries on the lower reaches of the river fear that China’s dam construction on the upper reaches of the Langcangjiang/Mekong in Yunnan will have serious ecological consequences for the entire Mekong catchment area. The last UN Biodiversity Conference took place online on October 11–15, 2021, the next one is scheduled to take place in Kunming in April of 2022.

Islam

June 17, 2021:

Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) cancels the 2021 Hajj due to the Corona pandemic

Referring to the continuing serious pandemic situation worldwide, the CIA announced that the Hajj of Chinese Muslims will also be suspended in 2021, as it was last year, in order not to endanger the health

and lives of the people of China. On June 12, the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah announced that, as in 2020, it would only admit Saudi citizens and those residing in Saudi Arabia to the Hajj; the total number of pilgrims was limited to 60,000. The pilgrim month began this year on July 11. The CIA is the sole approved operator for pilgrimages of Chinese Muslims to Mecca (chinaislam.net.cn June 17; haj.gov.sa June 12).

July 20–23, 2021:

Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha): Congratulations from the Religious Bureau – In Aksu, participation in public prayers prohibited for those under 50 years of age

On the occasion of the Islamic Feast of Sacrifice, Wang Zuo'an, Vice Minister of the United Front Department of the CCP and Director of the National Religious Affairs Administration, visited the office of the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) to convey his congratulations. Employees of the religious authorities of the city of Beijing went to Beijing's main mosques to inquire about the festival preparations, which included strict Corona prevention measures, including a restriction on the number of prayer participants. All Beijing mosques solemnly raised the national flag for the festival – according to a report on the CIA website.

A senior police officer from Aykol Township in Aksu City, Xinjiang, told *Radio Free Asia* that the government of Akyol had only allowed people over the age of 50 to participate in prayers during the Feast of Sacrifice, and that over 170 Uighurs accused of violating that provision were currently (i.e., in July) being held in custody. A resident of Aykol told the broadcaster that the police did not check each individual mosque, but instructed the heads of the 10-household units existing in Xinjiang to report unauthorized praying (chinaislam.net July 21, 22; rfa.org July 30).

August 17, 2021:

Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) hosts international video conference “How Will Muslim Community Adapt to the Contemporary Social Development”

The aim of the conference was to examine how the peaceful coexistence of people and the convergence of civilizations can be promoted and the building of a “community of common destiny for mankind” can be supported – said a conference report on the website of the CIA. Yang Faming, president of the CIA, expressed in his speech the hope that the Islamic community in all countries will continue contributing to overcome misunderstandings between nations, religions and civilizations. Ali Rashid Al-Nuaimi, chairman of the World Muslim Communities Council based in the United Arab Emirates, said Muslims should respect the constitution and laws of the countries where they live and respect all cultures. According to the conference report, he reaffirmed China's policy of freedom of belief and said that China places great importance on human rights. Rushan Abbyasov, deputy chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia, said that when interpreting Islamic teachings, more practical factors should be taken into account and the challenges and needs of Muslims should be addressed. He advocated a dialogue of religions and mutual tolerance. The chairman of the Islamic Association of Xinjiang, Abudulrekep Tumniyaz, said he could say from his own experience that the policy of freedom of belief in Xinjiang is being fully implemented (chinaislam.net.cn Aug. 20).

Rushan Abbyasov is a member of the Russian-Chinese working group for contacts and cooperation in the religious sphere, through which the contacts of the Russian Orthodox Church with China also run (muslim.ru).

Protestant Churches

July 11, 2021:

Police intervene against a Zoom service in Shenzhen

On July 11, an online service via Zoom of Shenzhen Trinity Gospel Harvest Church (深圳三一丰收福音教会) was cancelled by police officers. Pastor Mao Zhibin and Elder Chu Yanqing were not allowed to continue preaching. In April of this year, the unregistered church was banned by the authorities. With a special emphasis on the issue of justice, it attracts several young people involved in the field of human rights. On September 5, parishioners celebrated the 5th anniversary of their existence in a restaurant (chinaaid.net Sept. 16; LICAS July 27).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Until August 2021:

Church building in Fuzhou reconstructed by the city as part of its historical heritage

The Mingdao Church (明道教会), which was declared a historical heritage by the city of Fuzhou in 2018, was reconstructed by August of this year and reopened for ecclesiastical use. It was built in 1928 by English Anglicans. There are other historic church buildings in the capital of Fujian Province. The Church of Heavenly Peace (天安堂), founded in 1856 as the first Methodist church in China, is one particularly well known example (gospeltimes.cn Aug. 19).

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August 7, 2021:

Increasing pressure on a mega house church in Shanxi

The Golden Lamp Protestant Church (金灯台教堂) in Linfen District, Shanxi Province, is an unregistered church with tens of thousands of members. On August 7, Rev. Wang Xiaoguang and his wife, preacher Yang Rongli, and seven other parishioners were detained. An illegal baptism ceremony is suspected as the reason for the arrests. The huge church building of the congregation, completed in 2009, was blown up and demolished in 2018 due to unobtained building permits. Preacher Yang served a seven-year prison sentence for “illegal religious activities” from 2009 to 2016. In recent years, the Church has resisted increasing pressure from the religious authorities to register in the official umbrella organization of Chinese Protestants. The treatment of the Golden Lamp Protestant Church has now been raised from the provincial level to the national level (rfa.org Aug. 9).

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August 22, 2021:

New arrests at the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu

A group of officers and uniformed men entered Dai Zhichao's living quarters on August 22 to break up a service being held there by the banned Early Rain Covenant Church under his leadership. His mobile phone and other items have been confiscated. Assembly leader Dai, a parishioner He Shan and a num-

ber of minors were taken to the police station. While the minors were handed over to their parents after a short time, the two adults served a sentence of 14 days of police custody (rfa.org 3.09.).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

September 4, 2021:

Protestant Music School in Harbin closed

On September 4, the privately run secondary school with a focus on church music education, Maize Christian Music High School (麦子圣乐高中), was searched by state forces. Teaching materials and furniture were confiscated. Principal Xu, teachers, staff and about 90 students were taken to a police station for questioning. The school fees charged amounted to 17,000 RMB per year (equivalent to about 2,300 Euro) (chinese.christianpost.com Sept. 12).

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September 27, 2021:

Official exchange between the Chinese Christian Council, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW)

On September 27, members of the umbrella organizations of Protestant Christians in China met with Senior Church Councilor Ute Hedrich, EKD, and Dr. Eckhard Zemmrich, EMW, and others via Zoom for a discussion in which the mutual interest in partnership exchange was reaffirmed. It was the first official meeting between the church representations of both countries in more than two years. Mrs. Hedrich and Mr. Zemmrich – both not very long in their respective offices – introduced themselves and were welcomed as new friends. Pastor Shen Xuebin, vice president of the Chinese Christian Council, reported on the situation of Protestant congregations in China during the pandemic and the precautions currently being taken. He expressed a clear interest in the resumption of Sino-German interreligious consultations. Another topic was the participation of a Chinese delegation in the plenary assembly of the World Council of Churches, which is planned for the autumn of 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany.

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Catholic Church

June 22, 2021:

United Bible Societies and Chinese Catholic Church governing bodies discuss collaboration on new Chinese Bible translation

The inaugural online seminar on “Bible Translation and Chinese Culture” between the official governing bodies of the Chinese Catholic Church (Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and Bishops’ Conference, or “One Association, One Conference”) and the United Bible Societies (UBS, an interconfessional worldwide federation of Bible societies) was chaired by Bishop Shen Bin. Kuo Wee Seng, Director of the UBS China Partnership, gave a review of UBS’s 30 years of cooperation with the Catholic Church in China, starting with partnership in Bible paper support and free Bible distribution, then in other Bible ministry programs, and now in Bible translation. Bishop Guo Jincai, Secretary General of

the Chinese Bishops' Conference, emphasized in his keynote speech the high priority of Bible translation for "One Association, One Conference." Then three members of the "China Catholic Bible Translation Team" (this term appears only in the UBS report) and three Bible experts from UBS gave a lecture. Father Zhang Wenxi, head of the Bible department of "One Association, One Conference," spoke about the need for a new translation of the Bible, to which he attached twelve expectations. The priest Niu Zhixiong, lecturer at the Catholic Seminary of Jilin, spoke about the problem of translating *pneuma* in the Chinese language context. At the end of the event, Ignatius Lee, Executive Secretary General of the Hong Kong Bible Society, reiterated UBS's willingness to serve the Chinese Catholic Church in translating a version of the Bible that Chinese believers will value and understand (www.ubsc.org/china-catholic-church-ubs-joint-seminar; www.xinde.org/show/51045).

The revision of the translations and, if necessary, the retranslating of the canonical books of the religions of China is also a demand of Chinese religious policy.

July 9, 2021:

Bishop Matthew Cao Xiangde 曹湘德, Hangzhou, deceased

Bishop Cao was born on September 16, 1929 in Tangzhen, Pudong, Shanghai and in 1950 entered the Wensheng Regional Seminary of Jiaying, which was directed by the Lazarists. Two years later he moved to the seminary in Beijing. In 1954, he continued his studies in Haimen, Zhejiang Province, but was not ordained a priest until a few years after the Cultural Revolution, in 1985, by Bishop Jin Luxian of Shanghai. After his ordination, he worked at Hangzhou Cathedral and in two other parishes. On June 25, 2000, he was ordained Bishop of Hangzhou by the official Bishop of Haimen, Matthew Yu Chengcai, without permission from the Holy See. On June 8, 2008, at his request, he received legitimacy from the Vatican as a bishop, but without jurisdiction. The official obituary of the diocese reads, among other things: "Throughout his life, Bishop Matthew Cao Xiangde held on to his love for the fatherland and the Church. He adhered to the principles of the independent, autonomous, self-governing Church. He sacrificed himself for the Church, led a modest life, responsibly fulfilled his pastoral duties and served society." The funeral took place on July 12, 2021 with a limited number of participants. The diocese had requested that due to the epidemic, participation from outside Hangzhou should be avoided (*AsiaNews* July 10; *Fides* July 9; official obituary of the Diocese of Hangzhou can be found on xinde.org July 9).

July 13, 2021:

Xinde: "Cultural History Museum on Sinicization of the Catholic Church" of the Diocese of Jinan opened



Spacious rooms of the new museum in Jinan.
Photo: xinde.org.

The museum, located in the back courtyard of the bishop's house, aims to provide "Catholics with a comprehensive understanding of the history of the development of Catholicism in China, on the occasion of the centenary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party," according to a July 13 report by *Xinde*. The museum, with two exhibition rooms, was designed and furnished by the Catholic Yu Shuting with the support of the local bishop Zhang Xianwang. The objects and tablets were collected and arranged by Father Xiao Jianguo. The exhibition area

is arranged according to four themes: 1. Learning from history – a first look at the inculturation of the Catholic Church; 2. Harmony between Catholicism and Confucianism – attempts to Sinicize the Catholic Church; 3. Love for the country and the Church – the process of Sinicization of the Catholic Church; 4. Service to society – Practice of Sinicization of the Catholic Church. These main themes are subdivided into many sub-themes with text panels, photos and objects, such as the following topics: brief outline of Church history, 100 years of Church prohibition, short historical explanations of the appointments of bishops, the Catholic printing industry, origins of the names of God, origin of the name for the Catholic Church, indigenization of clothing, Christian images in the Chinese style, developments in the Sinicization of the clergy, presentation of bishops and priests since the founding of the country, Sinicization of the system, Sinicization of the liturgy, Sinicization of sacred music and art, Sinicization of church architecture, exchange with foreign countries, “red” churches, charitable enterprises. Saints and pioneers of the faith include St. Joseph Freinademetz SVD, Fr. Vincent Lebbe and the university founder Ma Xiangbo (xinde.org July 13).

The “Sinicization” (Zhongguohua 中国化) of all religions in China called for by President Xi Jinping in two speeches in 2015 and 2016 is a central part of the current religious policy of the Party and the State.

July 28, 2021:

Antonius Li Hui 李辉 is ordained coadjutor bishop of Pingliang (Gansu) – Fifth episcopal ordination since the provisional Sino-Vatican agreement of 2018



The elderly Bishop Han Jide lays hands on his designated successor.
Photo: xinde.org.

The consecration in Pingliang Cathedral was presided over by Bishop Ma Yinglin of Kunming, chairman of the Chinese Bishops’ Conference (which is not recognized by Rome). Co-consecrators were Bishops Han Jide of Pingliang and Guo Jincai of Chengde; Bishop Han Zhihai of Lanzhou attended the ceremony. The letter of approval of the Bishops’ Conference was read by its deputy general secretary, Father Yang Yu. The wording of the letter was not disclosed, so it is not known whether the Pope’s consent was mentioned in it (this has been the case with at least three of the consecrations since the signing of the Sino-Vatican agreement on episcopal appointments). Li Hui’s election as coadjutor candidate according to the official Chinese procedure took place on July 24, 2020. According to Matteo Bruni, director of the Holy See’s press office, Pope Francis appointed him on January 11, 2021 – that is, only after the official election and after the trial extension of the agreement in October 2020.

Coadjutor Bishop Li Hui was born in Meixian in Shaanxi in 1972. He entered the Pingliang Minor Seminary in 1990. In

1996 he completed his theological studies at the National Catholic Seminary in Beijing and was ordained a priest in the same year. According to *UCAN*, from 1998 until his election as coadjutor in 2020, he worked in the Secretariat of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops’ Conference on Liuyin Street in Beijing as secretary of the presidents of the Bishops’ Conference, so he has no pastoral experience in the diocese that he will lead in the future. According to *LICAS*, a priest, who did not want to be named, described Liuyin Street in a critical remark as a “training place for Chinese bishops” (*AsiaNews* July 28; *chinacatholic.cn* July 28; *LICAS* July 29; *UCAN* July 28; *Vatican News* July 28).

September 8, 2021:

Francis Cui Qingqi 崔庆琪 is consecrated Bishop of Wuhan



Eucharistic celebration at the episcopal consecration in Wuhan. In the center the new Bishop Cui Qingqi, on the left Bishop Shen Bin. Photo: xinde.org.

The consecration in Wuhan (Hankou) Cathedral was again led by Bishop Ma Yinglin of Kunming. Co-consecrators were Bishops Shen Bin of Haimen and Li Shan of Beijing. Bishops Li Suguang of Jiangxi and Ding Lingbin of Changzhi attended the ceremony. The letter of approval of the Chinese Bishops' Conference was again read by its deputy general secretary, Father Yang Yu. Cui Qingqi was elected as a bishop candidate on September 17, 2020, according to the official Chinese procedure. According to *Vatican*

News, Matteo Bruni confirmed that “Father Francis Cui Qingqi O.F.M.” [i.e., the new bishop is a Franciscan] was consecrated in Wuhan and that Pope Francis appointed him “Bishop of Hankou/Wuhan” on June 23, 2021 [just a few weeks before the consecration]. The three dioceses of Hankou, Hanyang and Wuchang established by the Vatican were merged many years ago by the official Chinese Church to form the Diocese of Wuhan. The Diocese of Wuhan has not had a bishop since the death of Bishop Dong Guangqing in May of 2007. – Bishop Cui Qingqi was born in Shanxi in February 1964. From 1987 to 1991 he studied theology at the seminary of the Diocese of Hankou, and in 1991 he was ordained a priest. Since 2012, he has been administrator of the Diocese of Wuhan. Since 2016 he has been one of the deputy secretaries general of the official Bishops' Conference and since 2018 Chairman of the Catholic “Two Associations” (Patriotic Association and Commission for Church Affairs) of Hubei Province. Bishop Cui is the sixth bishop consecrated under the Sino-Vatican agreement with the approval of both sides (*AsiaNews* Sept. 5, 8; *chinacatholic.cn* Sept. 8; *UCAN* Sept. 8; *Vatican News* Sept. 8). On the background to the elections of Li Hui and Cui Qingqi as bishop candidates, cf. *RCTC* 2021, No. 1, p. 11-12 – according to Hong Kong journalist Lucia Cheung of November 16, 2020, Li and Cui were the first real test cases for the agreement.

October 13, 2021:

Death of Bishop Emeritus Yang Xiangtai 杨祥太 of Handan

The Bishop Emeritus of Handan, Hebei Province, Stephan Yang Xiangtai, died at the age of 98. Bishop Yang was born on January 3, 1923 in Gaocun Village, Wu'an County, Henan Province (today Hebei Province). In 1935 he entered the Minor Seminary of the Diocese of Weihui and in 1940 began studying at the Regional Seminary in Kaifeng, Henan Province. He was ordained a priest in Kaifeng on August 27, 1949. He was arrested for the first time in 1954. He was arrested again in July 1966 and sentenced to 15 years in prison in October 1970 as a counter revolutionary. After his release and rehabilitation in March 1980, Yang worked as a pastor in Handan, Cixian, Shexian and Wu'an counties, which had become part of Hebei Province and the official Diocese of Handan with the new administrative division. Bishop Chen Bailu appointed him Vicar General in 1988 and ordained him Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Handan on November 30, 1996. On September 17, 1999, Bishop Yang became Ordinary Bishop of the Diocese of Handan. On June 21, 2011, he ordained Bishop Joseph Sun Jigen as

his coadjutor bishop. This was done in secret, a few days before the official date: that was to prevent the consecration ceremony, which had already been approved by the Holy See and the Chinese authorities, from being conducted by an illegitimate bishop.

Bishop Yang is described as a calm, reserved person with a deep love of humanity and a guarantor of unity. He had encouraged many seminarians and religious Sisters in their vocation. Bishop Yang also composed and wrote many hymns.

Handan is a very active diocese with 180,000 Catholics. Part of the Catholics belong to the underground Church (Yongnian Diocese) (*AsiaNews* Oct. 13; *LICAS* Oct. 15; *UCAN* Oct. 18; death notice of the diocese [on WeChat]; *chinacatholic.cn* Oct. 15; *xinde.org* Oct. 17, 18).

October 25, 2021:

Underground Bishop Shao Zhumin has disappeared once again

58-year-old Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou was taken to an unknown location by officials on October 25. Local officials are said to have announced that this was done for reasons of “tourism.” According to *UCAN*, this is the sixth time since the death of his predecessor, Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifang in 2016, that Bishop Shao has been abducted by the authorities. In a message, according to *AsiaNews*, Catholics were asked to pray for the bishop: “Pray that the Lord will give him confidence and courage, that he will not be demoralized by what happened; pray also that he will remain healthy and whole, under the guidance of Christ, so that he may return to us as soon as possible to shepherd his flock.” According to *AsiaNews*, Bishop Shao’s arrests always happen before important Catholic feast days: Christmas, Easter, Assumption, and now All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day.

Bishop Shao had been appointed by the Vatican as episcopal coadjutor and had taken over the leadership of the diocese after the death of Bishop Zhu. So far, he has not been recognized as a bishop by the Chinese government. Most recently, he was arrested in May 2017 and detained for seven months. The German Ambassador in Beijing and the Holy See publicly expressed their concern for Bishop Shao at the time. It is believed that once again the authorities will try to persuade Bishop Shao to join the Patriotic Association and the official Bishops’ Conference. The underground Catholic community is very strong in the Diocese of Wenzhou.

On July 27, Father Joseph Liu of the Diocese of Mindong in Fujian Province was arrested by the police. According to a report by *AsiaNews*, he was abused for ten hours and then forced by six police officers to sign his membership of the “independent Church” (*AsiaNews* July 28; Oct. 26; *UCAN* Oct. 27; see *RCTC* 2017, No. 4, p. 16).

Sino-Vatican Relations

August 12, 2021:

Cardinal Parolin comments on Sino-Vatican relations

During his summer vacation in Trentino, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin made the comments in an interview with the Italian news site *La Voce del Nordest*. Asked about the current status of relations with the People’s Republic of China, Cardinal Parolin said: “Well, at the moment we are still in the phase of dialogue. We have resumed the dialogue in view of the preparation of this agreement, which was signed three years ago, and which was then renewed after the first two years of the experiment. And we continue to do so. Of course, the dialogue has stalled a bit lately because of Covid. It is indeed difficult, it has also affected this area, this sector, but we hope that we can resume the meetings soon and deal with many other issues that are on the table and concern the life of the Catho-

lic Church in China.” The Cardinal emphasized the accompaniment in prayer for Chinese Catholics and continued: “We are proud of the testimony of faith they give, and we hope that they will always be good citizens and good Catholics, so that they may also express this double dimension in their concrete lives” (*CNS* Aug. 13; *Vatican News* Sept. 12; www.lavocedelnordest.eu/cardinaleparolin2021).

September 1, 2021:

Pope Francis: We should not give up dialogue with China

In his first interview after his operation on July 4, 2021, with the Spanish radio network *COPE*, Pope Francis commented on a wide range of questions asked by Spanish journalist Carlos Herrera. In response to the question about the agreement between the Vatican and China, Pope Francis said: “China is not easy, but I am convinced that we should not give up dialogue. You can be deceived in dialogue, you can make mistakes, all that ... But it is the way. Closed-mindedness is never the way. What has been achieved so far in China was at least [due] to the dialogue. ... Some concrete things like the appointment of new bishops, slowly.” For him, Cardinal Agostino Casaroli (1914–1998), who under Pope John XXIII was tasked with building “bridges with central Europe” and the communist countries, was a source of inspiration. “Today, somehow, we have to follow these paths of dialogue, step by step in the most conflictive situations” (*America Magazine* Sept. 1; *AsiaNews* Sept. 1; *Vatican News* Sept. 1; *cope.es* Sept. 1).

October 24, 2021:

Corriere della Sera quotes an anonymous Vatican representative on the issue of Taiwan in the Sino-Vatican negotiations

In a report by *Corriere della Sera*, an anonymous representative “from the highest echelons of the Holy See’s diplomacy” on the Taiwan issue is quoted as saying: “China wants us to break off diplomatic relations with Taiwan and in return promises to establish diplomatic relations with us. But we have always replied that Beijing must first allow us to open an apostolic nunciature in the capital. Only then can we review our relations with the government in Taipei. Since this step was never taken, everything remains the same. And let’s hope the situation doesn’t get worse ...” The newspaper’s report continues: “This is the first time that the issue of relations between China and the Vatican and Taiwan has been clearly formulated from the highest echelons of the Holy See’s diplomacy. And anonymity does not diminish the weight or authority of what is leaked” (*Corriere della Sera* Oct. 24).

Hong Kong

September 9, 2021:

Police raid on Tiananmen Museum in Hong Kong

The museum, which commemorated the Tiananmen Square massacres in Beijing on June 4, 1989, was searched by officials from the National Security Department. Exhibits from the museum were loaded into a truck, including a cardboard model of the “Goddess of Democracy,” the symbol of the 1989 student movement, as well as photos of Hong Kong’s annual memorial events for the victims of Tiananmen. The museum was closed by the authorities on June 2, 2021. On August 4, an online museum was opened as the “8964 Museum,” prepared by the former operator of the Tiananmen Museum, the Hong

Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, but independently acting with a foreign curatorial team.

Four members of the Alliance, which also organized the annual vigils, were arrested on September 8, including prominent democracy activist and lawyer Chow Hang Tung. The arrests were made under the National Security Law. Chow is accused of subversion. She was arrested earlier this year and charged with promoting an unauthorized gathering. She was later released on bail.

The National Security Department had required the Hong Kong Alliance to provide information on personal data of all members since the group's founding, as well as financial records. The Alliance had refused to do so a day before the arrests. The next morning, police officers arrested the members of the Alliance's Standing Committee in their homes or offices (*AsiaNews* Sept. 8; *BBC* Sept. 9; *Reuters* Aug. 4; www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3mQV-_psBU; link to the online museum: <https://8964museum.com/>).

Macau

July 26, 2021:

Bishop Stephen Lee of Macau visits Beijing

As the official bodies of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Bishops Conference announced on their website, Bishop Fang Xingyao, Chairman of the Patriotic Association, received a delegation from Bishop Stephen Lee Bun-sang (Li Binsheng) of the Catholic Diocese of Macau organized by the Liaison Office of the Beijing Central Government in Macau on July 26 in Beijing. Bishop Shen Bin, Vice President of the Patriotic Association and the Episcopal Conference, led the conversation. According to the report, he thanked the Diocese of Macau "for its long-standing efforts for the friendly development of the Church in both places" and hoped "that it will continue to strengthen the friendly relations between the two Churches and make the contribution it deserves to the development of the country and society." According to the report, Bishop Lee introduced the Diocese of Macau and its social services, "reviewed the past friendly exchange and looked forward to cultivating more exchange and cooperation between the two sides in the future." The visit was accompanied by the official in charge of the Central Government Liaison Office in Macau. The meeting was also attended by Liu Yuanlong, Vice President and Secretary General of the Patriotic Association, Father Wang Yuliang, Head of the Department of Church Affairs of "One Association, One Conference," as well as the head of the Department of Foreign Affairs (chinacatholic.cn July 26).

September 12, 2021:

Only 42% of registered voters participated in the elections to the Legislative Assembly in Macau

This was almost 15 percent less than in the 2017 election. The Seventh Legislative Assembly has 33 seats, of which 14 are elected directly and twelve indirectly (functional constituencies by professional sectors), as well as seven other deputies appointed directly by the Chief Executive of the Chinese Special Administrative Region of Macau, Ho Iat Seng. Macau has about 324,000 registered voters, of whom just over 137,000 went to the polls.

Authorities attributed the historically low voter turnout to the pandemic and weather. Tong Hio-fung, head of the Electoral Affairs Committee, said it was unfavorable for many residents living in Hong Kong, Taiwan or the mainland to return to Macau because they would be subject to quarantine. In Macau, a case of COVID-19 infection was last detected six weeks ago. Since the beginning of the pandemic, only a total of 63 cases have been registered.

The election winners came from seven of the 14 electoral lists. In July, however, 21 liberal and pro-democracy candidates on six electoral lists were disqualified for violating the Basic Law. They had, among other things, connections to pro-democracy leaders in Hong Kong, had attended a vigil commemorating the victims of the Tiananmen square massacre, or had visited Taiwan during the last presidential election (*AsiaNews* Sept. 13; *german.cri.cn* Sept. 12; *Hong Kong Free Press* Sept. 13).

September 9, 2021:

Catholic University in Macau is allowed to recruit students from Mainland China

For the first time in its 25-year history, the Catholic University of Saint Joseph is allowed to enroll students from the People's Republic of China in Macau with the permission of the Chinese Ministry of Education. In his official statement of 13 September, Rector Father Stephen Morgan reports that these are postgraduate programs in architecture, business administration, information systems and science. Without the support of the Liaison Office of China in Macau and the Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, permission to accept Chinese students would not have been possible. They are a university “in, from and for Macau, in, from and for China.” Over the years, the university has already established close relationships with a number of universities and research institutions on the Mainland. However, the admission of students in the subjects of theology and philosophy is not included.

The university – the only one of the four universities in Macau that has not yet been allowed to accept students from mainland China – is subordinate to the Diocese of Macau and is affiliated with the Catholic University of Portugal in Lisbon. Father Peter Stilwell, who headed the university from 2012 to 2020, told the British weekly magazine *The Tablet* that the University of Saint Joseph is the only university that, through its connection to Portugal and the Western style of teaching, truly preserves the tradition of higher learning in Macau (*Domradio* Sept. 22; *UCAN* Sept. 20; *oclarim.com* Sept. 15.,18).

Taiwan

July 30, 2021:

Taiwan's former vice president appointed member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences

The 70-year-old Taiwanese epidemiologist and politician Chen Chien-jen is a new member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. The health expert and vice president of the National Academy of Sciences in Taiwan (Academia Sinica) was vice president of Taiwan from 2016 to 2020. Chen became known for his work as Minister of Health during the SARS epidemic in 2003. A Catholic, Chen is a Knight of the Papal Order of St. Gregory and a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. – Chen is the second Taiwanese to be appointed a member of the Academy. This honor was previously last received by Nobel laureate in chemistry, Lee Yuan-Tseh.

According to *Vatican News*, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, first founded in 1603, is intended to “promote progress in mathematics, physics and natural sciences, as well as the study of the epistemological problems associated with them. The current president is the German agricultural scientist Joachim von Braun (71)” (*AsiaNews* Aug. 2; *Vatican News* July 30).

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