

News Update on Religion and Church in China March 30 – July 5, 2022

Compiled by Katharina Feith, Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle) and Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, with a contribution by Michael Kropp
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 2022, No. 2, pp. 3-17) covered the period November 13, 2021 – March 27, 2022.

Varia

May 7, 2022:

Chinese universities withdraw from international rankings

As reported by Chinese state media – according to *BBC Monitoring* on May 7, 2022 – Renmin University of China, Nanjing University and Lanzhou University have decided to withdraw from international university rankings. According to the *BBC* report, Chinese media largely supports the pullback, arguing that China should set its own assessment standards based on “Chinese characteristics.” Media and education experts in China, thus *BBC*, support the pull out, the abolition of foreign ranking standards would mean a “return of China’s educational sovereignty.” The report also cites the *South China Morning Post*, which reported that Renmin University in 2020 set up its own center to evaluate higher education in China, which “aims to evaluate higher education with Chinese characteristics and an international perspective.” On May 16, Beijing-affiliated Hong Kong news website *HK01* pointed out that the news of Chinese universities dropping from international rankings comes amid widespread speculation about China’s isolation from the world. However, the article concludes that “the door of China’s reform and opening-up has been opened, and it is impossible to close it easily,” *BBC* quotes *HK01*. kf

Religious Policy

April 2022:

First religious entities acquire an “Internet Religious Information Services License”

So far, there have only been a few reports of successfully acquired “Internet Religious Information Services License.” Among the first was the Xin’en Church in the City of Yiwu (Zhejiang), which acquired the

license on April 18. The licenses are issued by the provinces. In Guangdong Province, “Guangdong Catholicism” (Guangdong tianzhujiao), that is, the two official Catholic governing bodies of Guangdong Province – the Patriotic Association and the Commission for Church Affairs – was the first successful religious entity, it received the license on April 28, followed by the Protestant Guangdong Union Theological Seminary, which received its license on April 29. On the website of the seminary, gduts.org, the new license with the license number is given in the imprint at the bottom of the web-page.

Meanwhile, courses and exams for prospective “religious information verification personnel” continue – the organization applying for a license must prove that it has such qualified verifiers. According to *China Christian Daily* (CCD, June 28), the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Guangdong Province released the names of 127 people who passed the exam for religious information verification personnel. According to the CCD, the religious authority in Shanghai announced on June 23 that the exams would be held in stages in different groups and times depending on the corona situation (ccctspm.org May 9; chinachristiandaily.com June 28, 29; gospeltimes.cn [not accessible at editorial deadline]; xinde.org May 11).

The “Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services,” which came into force on March 1, 2022, provide for the acquisition of a license for the offering of such information services and for this, in turn, the existence of qualified information verification personnel must be proven. For a German translation of the “Measures,” see *China heute* 2022, No. 2, pp. 91-97 and www.china-zentrum.de/dokumente-zu-religion-und-politik. An English translation can be found at <https://bitterwinter.org/crackdown-on-religious-content-coming-march-2022>. For more background information, see *China heute* 2022, No. 1, pp. 4-5, and No. 2, pp. 74-76 (in German). *kwt*

June 1, 2022:

“Measures for the Administration of Financial Affairs of Sites for Religious Activities” take effect

The new administrative law standard was promulgated by the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) and the Ministry of Finance on February 11, 2022, but was not announced to the public until April 8. It applies to Buddhist and Daoist temples and monasteries, mosques, churches and other fixed venues for religious activities (Article 2) and replaces the previously applicable “Measures for the Supervision and Administration of Financial Affairs of Sites for Religious Activities (For Trial Implementation),” which was promulgated by the NRAA in 2010, at the time without the Ministry of Finance. At 55 paragraphs, the new “Measures” are slightly longer than the 2010 “Measures” which had 40 paragraphs. A new chapter, “Structure and personnel of the financial administration,” has been added. Otherwise, the division has been retained, namely in the chapters “General provisions,” “Administration of bookkeeping and accounting,” “Administration of the budget,” “Administration of income,” “Administration of expenditure,” “Asset administration,” “Supervisory administration, and “Legal responsibility.”

The text of the new “Measures for the Administration of Financial Affairs of Sites for Religious Activities” (宗教活动场所财务管理办法) can be found at www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2022/content_5696255.htm, a German translation of the 2010 “Measures” can be found in *China heute* 2012, No. 4, pp. 222-226 and at www.china-zentrum.de/dokumente-zu-religion-und-politik. *kwt*

June 7, 2022:

State Council announces the appointment of Cui Maohu as Director of National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA)

Cui Maohu 崔茂虎 replaces the previous director, Wang Zuo'an 王作安, in this function. Cui has also simultaneously taken over Wang's post as one of the vice chairmen of the Chinese Communist Party's United Front Work Department.

Why Cui Maohu was chosen for this post is unclear. In his previous career, he was not responsible for religious affairs. Cui was born in Yunnan in 1965. He has a degree in philosophy from Yunnan University. In 1990 he joined the Chinese Communist Party. He has held various party and government positions in Yunnan, most recently as vice governor of Yunnan Province (from May 2021) and secretary-general of the CCP Yunnan Provincial Committee (from November 2021).

Wang Zuo'an has worked in the NRAA since 1987 and took over its leadership in 2009. Overall, during his tenure as director – especially after Xi Jinping took office in 2013 – there was a strong tightening of party-state religious policy, including through a series of religious-political administrative laws. In 2018, the NRAA was incorporated into the CCP's United Front Department, and Wang became one of the vice-chairmen of the United Front Department (*South China Morning Post* June 9; *Xinhua* June 7). For the change in leadership of the NRAA, see also *China heute* 2022, No. 2, pp. 72-73 (in German). *kwf*

June 8, 2022:

Joint Conference of National Religious Organizations passes appeal for frugality and renunciation of extravagance – Cui Maohu's first appearance as NRAA director

At this online meeting, Cui delivered a speech to the assembled leaders of the official governing bodies of the five religions. The religious representatives passed a "Joint Appeal to Promote Frugality and Refrain from Extravagance" (关于崇俭戒奢的共同倡议). The appeal complains that greed, striving for riches, and extravagance in the religious field have spoiled the religious style, damaged the reputation of the religions and hindered their Sinicization. It calls for a frugal lifestyle and ecological behavior. Traditional wisdom and scriptures of the religions are quoted as proof that thrift is a traditional Chinese virtue that is necessary for the implementation of the socialist core values but also a moral standard that is common to all religions. In the weeks that followed, official bodies of the religions at all levels had to study the appeal (www.zyztb.gov.cn/tzyw/372063.jhtml – seen on June 10, not available at the time of going to press). *kwf*

July 1, 2022:

Official "religious circles" mark 101 years of Chinese Communist Party

After the religions had to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Party on a grand scale last year (see *China heute* 2021, No. 2, pp. 72-73 [in German] and *RCTC* 2021, No. 3, pp. 5-6), there were reports of similar ceremonies from individual locations this year as well – on each of the five recognized religions' (excluding Islam) official bodies' websites there was one report to be found. A report on the Chinese Daoist Association's website shows 21 photos of the raising of the national flag to celebrate 101 years of

the Party in various Daoist sites in Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Guizhou and Hunan Provinces. In some cases – for example at the flag ceremony of the Xishuangbanna Buddhist Association (Yunnan Province) on July 1st – 25 years of Hong Kong’s “return” to the Motherland were also celebrated. On the same day, Protestant churches in all districts of the City of Hohhot in Inner Mongolia held flag-raising ceremonies to celebrate the Party’s birthday and welcome the 20th party congress (at which Xi Jinping’s re-election as general secretary is on the agenda in October).

A cultural program with patriotic songs celebrating the Party’s birthday was held at the Catholic Cathedral of Leshan (Sichuan Province) on June 29 – the Feast of Peter and Paul. Bishop Lei Shiyin of Leshan, one of the seven previously illegitimate bishops recognized by the Pope in 2018, sang “I and my Fatherland” with priests and sisters. On the same day, Bishop Lei ordained two deacons as priests. The group photo after the consecration shows the church holding four banners, one bearing the motto “Listen to the Party, feel the goodness of the Party, go with the Party” (ccctspm.org July 6; chinabudhism.com.cn July 2; www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/22070262-1.htm August 7 [with group photo showing church with banners]; taoist.org.cn July 4). *kwt*

Religions in General

Spring 2022:

Corona infection waves and lockdowns – continued closure of religious sites and relief efforts by religions



Sisters delivering vegetable orders during the Tangshan-lockdown. Photo: xinde.org.

On April 18, 2022, the news portal *Caixin* reported that at least 22 cities with almost 30 million people were still in lockdown. According to the *China Table*, at times even a third of the Chinese were affected by curfews. The strict curfews often lasted for many weeks, in Shanghai, for example, from March 28 to early June. There are reports of organizations, communities and believers from the five recognized religions supporting the authorities in the “fight” against the virus – very often by donating relief supplies or by volunteering. In the affected areas, religious sites had to be closed and religious activities suspended. According to a June 6 post in *China Christian Daily*, official Protestant churches in some areas have often closed more days than they were open since the beginning of 2020 due to the pandemic. For example, a church in Heilongjiang was only open normally for 157 of the last 828 days.

For more details, see *China heute* 2022, No. 2, pp. 76-77 and pp. 112-114 (Pastor Annette Mehlhorn on her nine years with the German-speaking Christian

Community of Shanghai), both in German. For Buddhist monasteries in distress due to lockdowns, see the entry from around June 1, 2022, in the section “Buddhism.” *kwt*

Daoism

March 30, 2022:

Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) releases 2021 work report and 2022 plans from its January 26 board meeting

CDA chairman Li Guangfu presented the 2021 work report on January 26. Here are just a few of the details: The section on “self-building” of the CDA included regulations on official vehicles, annual appraisal and remuneration of staff, and regulations for retired Daoist clergy. A “general Party branch of the CDA” (协会党总支) and its activities are mentioned.

In the “religious affairs” section there was an emphasis on the strengthening of the administration of the Daoist religious personnel. The construction of a corresponding database was pushed ahead, the entry of the data of the “over 30,000 currently existing” Daoist religious personnel was basically completed. The dates of 674 Daoist religious priests were verified in 2021, 525 certificates for Daoist religious personnel were issued, as well as 1,500 *chuandu* 传度 and 200 *guanjin* 冠巾 certificates (i.e. certificates of first ordinations of Zhengyi and Quanzhen Daoists, respectively). Possession of a *guanjin* or *chuandu* certificate is, according to the currently valid regulations of the CDA, the presupposition for recognition as a Daoist religious cleric.

The section “protection of the rights and interests of Daoism” is interesting: This included the protection of Daoist intellectual property, for example in film and television (the CDA made a submission to this point to the Political Consultative Conference of the Chinese People), trademark protection as well as action against the denigration of Daoism through individual mobile phone games. In its section on “Sinicization of Daoism,” the work report referred to the third training course on this topic, which was carried out jointly with the Central Institute for Socialism, and to numerous local actions, e.g. a scripture interpretation event organized by the Daoist Association of Hunan on the topic “The Heart Faithfully Devoted to the Party – Sinicization of Daoism.” A plan for Daoist education 2022–2025 has been approved (see next entry). In the section “Daoist charity” it is listed, among other things, that RMB 1.1 million was allocated for the maintenance of financially weak monasteries and almost half a million RMB was used to finance the pensions of 143 needy elderly Daoist priests.

Of the CDA’s plans for 2022, it is worth mentioning the preparation of the 5th International Daoist Forum and the groundwork for the establishment of a World Association of Daoism (which has been planned for some time) (www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=7820&p=%27p%27).

For the *chuandu* and *guanjin* certificates, see K. Wenzel-Teuber, “Statistics on Religions and Churches,” in: *RCTC* 2022, No. 2, pp. 18-42, here pp. 21-22. *kwf*

March 31, 2022:

Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) releases 2022–2025 education plan from its January 26 board meeting

On January 26 of this year, the board of the CDA approved an educational framework of Chinese Daoism for the years 2022 to 2025 (中国道教教育规划纲要 [2022-2025年]). Measures are planned in various areas. First and foremost is the raising of ideological consciousness. Guided by the Xi Jinping ideas for a socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new age, the political and ideological education should continue to “penetrate into minds and hearts.” Party building (!) and political and ideological work [at the Daoist training centers] should be pushed forward from “soft guidelines” to “hard reining.” Another goal is to streamline the training system and increase funding – including through application-oriented, specialized talent training and efforts to attract more government fund-

ing. The curricula are to be optimized, including using the curricula of general universities and modern educational concepts. A series of “brand courses” (品牌课程) are to be created for the professional teaching of Daoism. Institutes for Daoist education are encouraged to form teaching and learning communities, coordinate curricula and allocate resources rationally. In order to increase the teaching capacity, among other things, the establishment of a department for Daoism teacher training and the recruitment of highly qualified lecturers from society who are well versed in Daoism and have teaching experience are proposed. In addition, Daoist religious personnel who work full-time as lecturers should be encouraged to obtain degrees from general colleges (www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=7822&p=%27p%27). *kwf*

Buddhism

April 20, 2022:

International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) reports on the background to the destruction of three giant Buddha statues in Draggo County

According to the ICT, first the school of the Gaden Namgyal Ling monastery in Draggo (Chinese: Luhuo) County, which belongs to the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, was destroyed on October 31, 2021, by order of the authorities. Starting December 12, a 99-foot (about 30-meter) tall Buddha statue was demolished, then a 45-foot tall statue of Guru Padmasambhava, and starting December 21, a three-story (about 40-foot tall) statue of Buddha Maitreya. Many Tibetans protesting against the demolitions have been arrested, ICT said. The organization gave the names of 11 Tibetans – including four monks and one nun – who were detained for a variety of reasons ranging from reporting the destruction to the outside world to using photos of the statues as their social media profile pictures. Two of those arrested have since been released. According to ICT, earthquakes are common in Draggo County; the local population donated for the construction of the statues in the religious belief that they will help avert natural disasters.

According to ICT, the demolitions began shortly after Wang Dongsheng, a Tibetan cadre, was appointed party secretary of Draggo County on October 13, 2021. He is said to have previously overseen the demolition of large parts of the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy as deputy party secretary of Serthar County. ICT ties the demolitions of the Buddha statues to Wang’s apparent efforts (as revealed in Draggo County’s 2021 Annual Report) to implement the central leadership’s “law-based governance” strategy. ICT counters that the destroyed statues were built in 2015 with the permission of the local authorities, which was still allowed under the 2005 “Regulations on Religious Affairs” in force at the time. Only the revised “Regulations for Religious Affairs,” which came into force in 2018, prohibit the “construction of large outdoor religious statues outside [the grounds] of temples or churches” (Article 30) (savetibet.org April 20). *kwf*

Around June 1, 2022:

Donglin Monastery on Lushan Mountain in Jiangxi is distributing 500,000 pounds of food to monasteries in distress due to the pandemic in 22 provinces

The project “Nourishing the sangha in small monasteries” started on May 27 with an announcement from Donglin Monastery. In the following, according to a report on the monastery’s public WeChat

account, the project team was inundated with applications and learned that the situation at some monasteries is even more difficult than expected. In just a few days, the first batch of food aid – 41,550 (Chinese) pounds of rice, 971 barrels of cooking oil and dried vegetables – was distributed to 248 needy monasteries with a total of 1,100 monks and nuns. The project is to be continued. Where the funds for the project come from is not stated, but the announcement mentions donations from the public.

As to the background of the project, the announcement says: “The pandemic is now in its third year. In order to prevent and protect the life and health of believers, religious sites everywhere have again and again been placed under ‘double suspension,’ with temples and monasteries closed for long periods without any income. A few small monasteries in remote, sparsely populated places that are difficult to access in terms of transport, which are already economically disadvantaged and live in hardship, have not yet been able to fully restore their incense sales. Today, when the supply is really difficult and food is scarce, the monks and nuns have to struggle to make ends meet, in some of the small monasteries the state of emergency has broken out again [...]”

The project is not the first such action of the monastery. Donglin Monastery has been organizing “Help for monasteries in need” since May 2020, i.e. soon after the outbreak of the pandemic. According to another report, from the start of the campaign two years ago to May 27 this year, Donglin Monastery has sent aid to 1,850 needy monasteries, provided medical aid to 74 needy critically ill monks and nuns, and donated a total of RMB 54,276,000 for aid (WeChat account jxldsonglinsi May 27; June 01 – <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/JT-XX-dvww3R9DLORTW6IA>; <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/eqGUYryrL-HDbRRZNk41cLg>). *kwt*

June 27, 2022:

***Sixth Tone* reports on the precarious residency status of monks from Myanmar and Laos in Yunnan**

Yunnan is the only province in China where Theravada Buddhism is widespread. A report by anthropologist Ma Zhen on *Sixth Tone*, a portal of the state-funded Shanghai United Media Group, speaks of a shortage of trained monks in the southwestern region. In Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, according to a 2018 field study by Ma, 296 of the 589 Buddhist temples had resident monks from Myanmar and Laos, and 100 temples had no resident monk at all. However, these – in many cases apparently well-trained – “migrant monks” have had problems with their residence status in recent years due to China’s stricter border control regulations, Ma writes. She says that since the end of 2018, Chinese authorities demanded that the monks from Myanmar and Laos show their ordination certificate, passport, ID card and numerous other legal documents, otherwise they would be repatriated. In other places in Yunnan, according to Ma, the shortage of monks is even more serious: In 2010, 86% of the temples in the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, 40% of the temples in Lincang City and 25% of the temples in Pu’er City had no resident monks (sixthtone.com June 27). *kwt*

Islam

March 31, 2022:

Qinghai Islamic Association announces issuance of new version of ID card for Islamic religious personnel

A first group of 2,618 Islamic clerics from Qinghai province have already received the new certificate. It contains a counterfeit-proof QR code logo that can be scanned with WeChat to display the Islamic

religious clergy's personal details, photos and other information. Before the new certificates were issued, the data of the persons concerned were "verified in stages," first by the Islamic Association of the county, then by the city or district and finally by the province. The new ID cards are intended to improve the administration of the Muslim clergy – said the report on the website of the Chinese Islamic Association (chinaislam.net.cn March 31). *kwt*

May 16, 2022:

Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) cancels the Hajj once again for 2022

Although Saudi Arabia allowed foreign pilgrims into the country for the Hajj 2022 (July 7–12) for the first time since the beginning of the corona pandemic, the CIA has canceled the pilgrimage again. Its "Notice of the Suspension of the 2022 Hajj" said China has made great strategic gains in fighting the pandemic, but it is virulent around the world. At the holy sites in Saudi Arabia, there is a high risk of infection with the corona virus due to the large number of pilgrims in a small space. There has been a recent surge of outbreaks in China, it said, and prevention measures are still strict, so people's health is being put first and Hajj is being suspended (sxyslj.com May 16).

The CIA is the only Chinese government-approved organizer of pilgrimages to Mecca by PRC citizens. For the new 2020 government regulations for the Hajj of Chinese Muslims, see *China heute* 2020, No. 4, pp. 186-188 (in German). *kwt*

May 24, 2022:

Largest data leak to date on detention centers in Xinjiang also includes police photos of 330 persons imprisoned because of religion

The so-called "Xinjiang Police Files" – a large body of tens of thousands of files containing confidential or internal data from the Xinjiang Autonomous Region police network, including photos from re-education camps, internal speeches and instructions, from the 2,000s to the end of 2018 – were leaked to Xinjiang researcher Adrian Zenz by a hacker. A consortium of 14 international media, including *Bayrischer Rundfunk* and the magazine *Der Spiegel*, presented them to the public on May 24 (see dw.com May 24). According to Zenz's description of the files, they also contain a spreadsheet titled "persons subjected to strike hard because of religion." According to Zenz, it lists 330 people with photos who were convicted of illegal religious activities such as studying the Qur'an. For his description and analysis of the data, see Adrian Zenz, "The Xinjiang Police Files: Re-Education Camp Security and Political Paranoia in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," in: *Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies* 2022, No. 3, pp. 1–56 (Online First), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25365/jeacs.2022.3.zenz>, here p. 33. *kwt*

Protestant Churches

April 12, 2022:

Chinese Christians open their first theological seminary in Italy

According to a report by the Italian Evangelical Alliance on April 25, the Italian Chinese Theological Seminary was opened in Rome by a group of 55 churches. It will train pastors for Chinese speaking

congregations in Italy and other European countries. The seminary was inaugurated on April 12. About 300 people attended the inauguration, including many representatives of Chinese churches in Italy and some from other European countries, as well as about 30 Italian guests. The new facility will operate from a renovated hotel acquired by the Chinese Christian Church in Italy, a grouping of 55 Chinese churches. The building is located within the area of the Tor Vergata University. According to the Institute's website (itcts.org, in Chinese only), the degrees of Bachelor of Theology and Master of Divinity will be awarded. The website explains why the seminary was set up as follows: "In addition to Italy, Chinese churches [...] are also widespread in Spain, France and many other countries in Europe. Many of its leaders have recognized that the church model that has worked so well in the past is becoming increasingly unsustainable in a pluralistic world. It is not enough for believers to simply attend meetings and hear sermons; they need systematic biblical teaching and holistic pastoral care for their lives. The complexity of family and youth issues calls for specialized and professional evangelism and ministry" (evangelicalfocus.com April 25; seminar website at itcts.org). *kf*

May 10, 2022:

Measures taken against largest house church in Xiamen, Fujian Province – preacher and his wife summoned to appear in court

With a history of over 100 years, the Xunsiding Church (巡司頂教會) in Xiamen is one of the traditional house churches. It is the largest house church in the city. Preacher Yang Xibo 楊希伯 is the fourth generation to lead the church. His father and aunt were previously sentenced to long prison terms of 5 and 15 years, respectively, for opposing the church's joining the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. On May 19, 2019, the church was banned. Police guarded the site at 5 Xunsiding Street for 30 days to prevent any further activity. A fine of 25,000 RMB was imposed. Meetings, services and gatherings in small groups continued to take place in different places: in private homes, under the Yanwu Bridge by the sea or in hotels. The authorities repeatedly disrupted and terminated the meetings. House searches and confiscation of religious materials also took place. On July 29, 2021, the Siming District People's Court in Xiamen fined Yang Xibo and his wife Wang Xiaofei 王晓飞 100,000 RMB each for organizing illegal gatherings. The couple's appeal was denied on November 25, 2021, on the grounds that both continued to participate in illegal religious activities and engaged in organizational behavior. Yang and Wang were called to the court for another hearing in the case on May 10, 2022 (UCAN May 3; <https://ipkmedia.com/137215/>).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

June 2022:

Graduation ceremonies at theological seminaries

In June, theological seminaries in the People's Republic of China held graduation ceremonies for theological graduates of various degrees. A total of 162 people graduated from the national Nanjing Theological Seminary this year: 137 received their four-year undergraduate bachelor's degrees, and 25 had studied for three more years and earned a master's degree. Although much of the class was conducted online after the New Year's break, the June 20 graduation ceremony was conducted at the seminary church on campus. Greetings from the former President of the Chinese Christian Council (CCC), Pastor Dr. Gao Feng, Acting President of the CCC Pastor Wu Wei, and Three-Self Patriotic Movement Chairman Elder Xu Xiaohong were broadcast online on a big screen from Shanghai. Yanjing Theological Seminary in Beijing celebrated the graduation of 16 undergraduate theology students on June 12. In



Graduation ceremony at Yanjing Theological Seminary in Beijing, 2022. Photo: ccctspm.org.

the number of students. It hopes to soon be upgraded to the rank of theological seminary by the religious authority and get approval to offer a three-year undergraduate degree in theology (ccctspm.org June 14; gxcctspm.cn June 14).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

some places in China, teaching and campus life have not been affected by the pandemic this year. For example at the Bible School of Guangxi Province in Nanning. On June 11, the graduations in three possible courses were celebrated there: for the 8th time in the basic course in theology (two years of training), for the 26th time in knowledge of the Bible (one year of training) and for the 10th time in church music (one year of training). The Bible School has succeeded in improving the academic quality of the training and increasing

Catholic Church

April 29, 2022:

Four underground priests of Baoding Diocese disappear – According to *AsiaNews*, a total of 10 Baoding priests have disappeared since January

Four priests, Fr. Yang Jianwei 杨建伟, Fr. Zhang Chunguang 张春光, Fr. Zhang Zhenquan 张振全 and Fr. Yin Shuangxi 尹双喜, disappeared on the afternoon of April 29 in Xushui, Baoding City. Missing person reports and a search call issued by relatives circulated on social networks. According to a post by Wang Zhicheng in *AsiaNews*, Fr. Zhang Shouxin 张守欣 also disappeared in Baoding on April 30. In addition, Wang named five other Baoding underground priests who were abducted by the authorities between January and April 2022, namely, Frs. Chen Hechao 陈合超, Ji Fuhou 姬福厚, Ma Ligang 马里刚, Yang Guanglin 杨广林 and Shang Mancang 商满仓. According to Wang Zhicheng, the priests are subjected to *guan zhi* 管制 (literally “control”), which is not physical prison but restrictions of movement and forced participation in political training with the aim of coercing them to join the official Church. Wang recalls that the bishop of Baoding’s underground community, Bishop Su Zhimin 苏志民, has been in the hands of the police since 1997 and Fr. Liu Honggeng 刘红更 has been imprisoned for seven years. The unofficial community of Baoding has been divided since Bishop Su Zhimin’s former auxiliary bishop, An Shuxin 安树新, decided to work publicly after his release in 2006 from ten years in prison and was officially installed as the bishop of Baoding in 2010 (*AsiaNews* May 3; *UCAN* August 9, 2010). *kw*

May 10, 2022:

Bishop Peter Wu Junwei of Xinjiang, Shanxi Province, has died



Bishop Peter Wu Junwei. On the right: Bishop Wu visits a food stand run by volunteers from the Diocese of Xinjiang for evacuees of the October 2021 floods. Photos: xinde.org.

Bishop Peter Wu Junwei 武俊维 is reported to have died unexpectedly at the age of 58 as a result of a heart attack. Since 2009 he has presided over the Xinjiang/Yuncheng Diocese in southern Shanxi Province. Bishop Wu was born on June 27, 1963. In 1985 he entered the Taiyuan Seminary and was ordained a priest on December 9, 1990. Initially active as parish priest, from 1996 to 2001 he was diocesan director for ecclesiastical affairs and head of the propaedeutic seminary of the diocese of Taiyuan. From 2001 to 2009 he was the rector of the Shanxi Major Seminary in Taiyuan. On September 21, 2010, with the approval of

Pope Benedict XVI and the Chinese authorities he was consecrated Bishop of Xinjiang/Yuncheng. One of Bishop Wu's central concerns was the social work of the Church, especially helping needy, elderly people. The concerns and needs of the rural population were also particularly close to his heart. But Bishop Wu was also concerned about the future of the Church: it was important to him to communicate the contents of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and the encyclical *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis in his diocese, also to show the bond between his believers and Rome and the universal Church (see also Michael Kropp, "Per caritatem servite" – Zum Tode von Bischof Wu Junwei (1963–2022)" in *China heute* 2022, Nr. 2, S. 80-81).

Michael Kropp

May 10, 2022:

AsiaNews: Bishop Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou spotted in Beijing – Underground Bishops Zhang Weizhu and Cui Tai remain in custody

Catholic sources told *AsiaNews* in May that Wenzhou (Zhejiang) Bishop Shao Zhumin 邵祝民 was spotted in Beijing. They said that he recently had an operation and is currently in a nursing home where he is monitored day and night by police officers. Bishop Shao Zhumin is not recognized as bishop by the government and has been arrested and kidnapped several times, most recently on October 25, 2021; he was released again in November (see *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, pp. 11-12; 2021, No. 4, p. 17; 2022, No. 1, p. 11).

According to *UCAN* on May 24, underground bishop Zhang Weizhu 张维柱 of Xinxiang in Henan Province was still in detention a year after his arrest on May 21, 2021 (see *RCTC* 2021, No. 3, p. 13). *Bitter Winter* said on June 22 that underground Coadjutor Bishop Cui Tai 崔太 of Xuanhua in northern Hebei was still detained. Cui Tai has been repeatedly arrested by the authorities since 2007, most recently in June 2020 (see *RCTC* 2020, No. 4, p. 13) (*AsiaNews* May 10; *Bitter Winter* June 22; *UCAN* May 24). *kwt*

June 13 and 29, 2022:

Priests ordained in the dioceses of Yuncheng, Fuzhou, Wanzhou and Leshan

In the Xinjiang/Yuncheng Diocese, Shanxi Province, on June 13, Deacon Jia Hongwei was ordained a priest. Archbishop Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan was the ordaining prelate, since the local bishop Wu Junwei had suddenly died shortly before, on May 10 (see entry above). The other new priests – two in Fuzhou, Fujian, one in Wanzhou, Chongqing, and two in Leshan, Sichuan – were ordained by their respective local bishops on June 29. These six priestly ordinations are the first ordinations in 2022 for the Church in mainland China to be reported in Catholic media (*Agenzia Fides* July 1; *xinde.org* June 30; July 8). *kwt*

June 29, 2022:

40 people are baptized in Wenzhou Cathedral



Baptism service in Wenzhou on 29 June 2022. The baptised, recognisable by their white clothes, are seated to the left and right of the central aisle of the church. Photo: *xinde.org*

Of the 52 participants in the Cathedral's 21st catechumenate course, forty were baptized and twelve were confirmed in the evening mass on the patronal feast of Saints Peter and Paul. The course began on October 16, 2021 with baptismal classes. This time there were more young people among the baptismal candidates than in previous courses, according to the report on the *Xinde (Faith)* portal. A follow-up course on catechumenate affirmation is now to be organized for the newly baptized (*xinde.org* July 04). *kwt*

Sino-Vatican Relations

April 11, 2022:

In an interview, Cardinal Secretary of State Parolin expresses the hope that the agreement can still be adapted successfully

Andrea Gagliarducci of the *Catholic News Agency (CNA)* on April 11 published in summary part 3 of an interview with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who, as head of the Vatican Secretariat of State, is also responsible for negotiations with China. In view of the approaching expiry date [October 22, 2022] of the preliminary Sino-Vatican agreement on bishop appointments, Cardinal Parolin told Gagliarducci: "We are reflecting on what to do. COVID did not help us because it interrupted the ongoing dialogue. We are trying to resume the dialogue concretely, with meetings that we hope will occur soon. We will reflect on the results of the agreement and possibly on the need to make clarifications or review some

points.” Asked if he would like to tweak the deal, Parolin said, “I hope so.” Gagliarducci wrote that Cardinal Parolin did not say which aspects of the agreement – the content of which was never revealed – he hoped to change.

A month later, according to *Vatican News*, Cardinal Parolin said Cardinal Zen’s arrest (on May 11, 2022, see entry in the Hong Kong section) should not be read as a “disavowal” of the agreement; he further said: “The most concrete hope is that initiatives such as this one will not complicate the already complex and not simple path of dialogue between the Holy See and the Church in China.”

Lucia Cheung, who used to head *UCAN*’s Hong Kong China office, explained in a post on her blog about the *CNA*’s interview with Cardinal Parolin that it is the practice of the Holy See to remain silent when negotiations are going well. She reminds us that, on the other hand, in the run-up to the first extension of the agreement in 2020 – which, as was subsequently revealed, was not without problems – a number of important Church representatives spoke out in interviews. She argues that Cardinal Parolin’s remarks in the *CNA* interview may be intended for Beijing’s ears and could be the start of activities from the side of the Vatican to build momentum ahead of the third accord. Cheung also presents the following counter calculations: Of the 6 bishops ordained since September 2018, 3 (Yao Shun, Xu Hongwei and Liu Genzhu) were appointed by the Pope long before the agreement, while, according to Cheung, the 3 others (Cui Qingqi, Li Hui and probably also Chen Tianhao) were elected according to the official Chinese procedure and only then appointed by the Pope – i.e. parity between Rome and Beijing. With the signing of the agreement in September 2018, 8 (one of them posthumously) illegitimate bishops from Rome’s perspective were recognized by the Pope, while since then 6 bishops who were legitimate from Rome’s perspective (illegal from the government’s perspective) have been recognized by the government – giving Beijing a head start of 2 bishops. The Vatican is negotiating with a secular, atheist regime that views episcopal appointments in terms of wins and losses, writes Lucia Cheung. She believes there will be a new “round of the game” between the two sides before the agreement expires in October, because in March, Fr. Wang Yaosheng was unanimously elected bishop candidate in Zhengzhou Diocese in Henan, and according to reports – thus Cheung – Wang is regarded very negatively by the Vatican (*catholicnewsagency.com* April 11; *Vatican News* May 13; *www.luciacheungoffice.medium.com* April 18). *kwt*

July 2, 2022:

Pope hopes for renewal of the China agreement

In an exclusive 90-minute interview that Pope Francis gave to *Reuters* correspondent Philip Pullella on July 2, he also discussed the Sino-Vatican agreement on the appointment of bishops, which is due for a second extension on October 22, 2022. *Vatican News* also published a summary of some statements. In the interview, Pope Francis defended the policy of small steps, according to *Reuters* he said: “Many people said so many things against John XXIII, against Paul VI, against Casaroli,” but “diplomacy is like that. When you face a blocked situation, you have to find the possible way, not the ideal way, out of it,” Pope Francis said. The Pope went on to say: “Diplomacy is the art of the possible and of doing things to make the possible become a reality.” When it comes to appointing bishops, the Pope sees results: It “is going slowly, but they are being appointed.” In the interview, the Pope also spoke of China’s own challenges: “They also have their own problems,” said Francis, referring to the different attitudes of the local authorities in China, “because it is not the same situation in every region of the country. It (the treatment of Catholics) also depends on local leaders.” In conclusion, the Pope said: “The agreement is moving well and I hope that in October it can be renewed.” In the interview, Pope Francis particularly appreciated the diplomatic skills of Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin: “The one who is handling this agreement is Cardinal Parolin, who is the best diplomat in the Holy See, a man of high diplomatic standing. And he knows how to move, he is a man of dialogue, and he dialogues with the Chinese au-

thorities. I believe that the commission that he chairs has done everything to move forward and look for a way out. And they have found it,” said the Pope (*Vatican News* July 5; *Reuters* July 5). *kf*

Hong Kong

April 21, 2022:

Hong Kong priest criticizes Chinese government

In a broadcast by *EWTN*, Hong Kong priest Fr. Vincent Woo publicly asserted that the Chinese Communist Party wants to control all aspects of society, including religious practice. A Protestant pastor was recently detained and charged for posting anti-government comments on his YouTube channel, Fr. Woo mentioned. “As priests and bishops, we are called to be prophets, to speak out against injustice in our society,” he said. “But that example of the Protestant pastor shows priests and bishops in Hong Kong that if you preach something against the government, there will be tremendous consequences, and because of that in the past two years, you rarely see any priest or bishop in Hong Kong that would say anything publicly against the Hong Kong government or the CCP.”

Woo also criticized the policy of Sinicization, according to which anything in Christian doctrine that is not in conformity with socialist teaching will have to be “cast out.” The Party, thus Woo, will likely set its sights on controlling Christian schools in Hong Kong, many teachers have recently left the schools. Father Woo also critiqued many other issues related to Hong Kong and the situation of the Church in China. When asked if he wasn’t worried about what might happen to him now that he is speaking out, Woo said, “I’m the only person in my diocese who is able to do it at the moment.” – Fr. Woo is currently pursuing a PhD in canon law in the USA (*LiCAS / Catholic News Agency* April 27; the interview can be heard at www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8DWZIKcQAQ&t=145s). *kf*

May 11, 24, 2022:

Arrest of Cardinal Zen in Hong Kong and first court date

On May 11, 2022, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kai was arrested along with other members of a trust fund supporting democracy activists and released on bail a few hours later. At the first court hearing on May 24, charges of misregistration of the fund were filed. The arrest sparked worldwide outrage and condemnation.

The Diocese of Hong Kong responded with two press statements on May 12 and 24 and a personal Facebook post from Bishop Stephen Chow. According to Bishop Chow, Cardinal Zen wanted his matter to be handled “low profile.” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, speaking at a regular press conference on May 12, on being asked about Cardinal Zen’s arrest cited Hong Kong’s rule of law and forbade interference in Hong Kong’s affairs. Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin expressed his concern at the arrest on May 13, but at the same time said the event should not be read as “a disavowal” of the Sino-Vatican agreement on the appointment of bishops. On May 14, Cardinal Charles Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar, and President of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, issued a critical statement siding with Cardinal Zen, denouncing the increasing loss of civil and political liberties in Hong Kong (*Reuters* May 11; *Ta Kung Po* Jan. 27; *The Standard* May 11; *UCAN* May 11; *Vatican News* May 11, 13; <https://catholic.org.hk/en/media-20220512/>; <https://catholic.org.hk/en/media-20220524/>; http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/fyrth/202205/t20220512_10685185.htm; www.catholicarchdioceseofyangon.com/newview.php?id=175; see Statements – in German – in *China heute* 2022, Nr. 2, S. 98-99). *kf*

Beginning of June 2022:

New version of the history: “Hong Kong wasn’t a British colony”

New Hong Kong textbooks for senior secondary students teach students that the city was occupied territory and not a British colony. The new textbooks were published in early June as part of the revised Liberal Studies course, renamed Citizenship and Social Development, introduced last September. Central to the new curriculum are the themes of national security, identity, patriotism and lawfulness. As the *South China Morning Post* writes, the revised curricula point out that the Chinese government has never recognized the Treaty of Nanking. The treaty was signed after the first Opium War in 1842 and forced the country’s last imperial dynasty to cede the possession of Hong Kong island to the British. The schoolbooks do not refer to Hong Kong as a colony, instead they say that the city was under “colonial administration of Great Britain.”

“Chinese governments succeeding the Qing dynasty have never recognized the unequal treaties and they have never given up sovereignty over Hong Kong. Therefore, Hong Kong is not a colony,” the newspaper quoted from a book. “In the 1960s, the United Nations established the Special Committee on Decolonization to aid colonies in gaining the right to self-determination and independence. To safeguard her sovereignty over Hong Kong and Macau, China demanded the committee to remove Hong Kong and Macau from its list of colonies in 1972.” The textbook states that the resolution was adopted by a majority vote (*South China Morning Post* June 24). *kf*

June 4, 2022:

Ban on commemorations of the 1989 Tianan’men massacre

For the third year in a row, Hong Kong authorities banned the annual vigil commemorating the victims of the Tianan’men massacre. Reasons were the COVID pandemic and the national security law. The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, which traditionally organized the commemoration in Victoria Park, was dissolved in September last year. For the first time, the Catholic Church canceled memorial services due to concerns about the national security law, even though Holy Masses were held in Catholic churches. According to *AsiaNews*, in a Mass beforehand, Cardinal Joseph Zen mentioned the “brothers and sisters” who sacrificed their lives “for our democracy and our freedom.” A prayer meeting was held at the Ward Memorial Methodist Church in Yau Ma Tei on May 31. Rev. Yuen Tin-yau from the Methodist Church told the *South China Morning Post*, “Praying for the Chinese church and the country is fully justified, how do we violate the national security law just by praying for the country?” The meeting was attended by a few dozen people. Despite warnings, several foreign missions posted pictures and references to 1989 on social media, and the US consulate and EU mission placed lit candles in windows. The Chinese Foreign Ministry later sent a letter to various foreign consulates in Hong Kong, expressing “strong disapproval and firm opposition” of their commemoration of the anniversary. Amid heavy police presence in the city on June 4, six people were arrested for allegedly inciting others to participate in an unauthorized assembly (*AsiaNews* June 2,4; *BBC* June 6,7; *South China Morning Post* May 31). *kf*

July 1, 2022:

Hong Kong’s Chief Executive John Lee is inaugurated

On the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong’s handover to the People’s Republic of China, the new head of government of the Chinese Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was inaugurated. Former Sec-

retary of Security John Lee Ka-chiu takes over from Carrie Lam, who has been Chief Executive since July 1, 2017. She was not seeking a second term. “The 64-year-old Lee is considered a political hardliner and is notorious for his absolute loyalty to the Chinese central government,” according to the May 8 *Tagesschau*. In the sham democratic election, there was only one candidate, more than 99 percent of the approximately 1,500 members of the Election Committee voted for Lee.

China’s President Xi Jinping traveled to the 25th anniversary celebrations and Lee’s inauguration. During Xi’s two-day visit, massive police forces were deployed, entire neighborhoods cordoned off, and domestic and foreign media coverage severely curtailed. In his speech, Xi said Hong Kong’s “true democracy” began with its return to China in 1997. But only “patriots” should rule Hong Kong. – Like Carrie Lam, John Lee is also a member of the Catholic Church. His philosophy of life is “helping society as a whole,” the *South China Morning Post* quotes him from a press conference (*AsiaNews* July 1; *Tagesschau* May 8; *South China Morning Post* May 3; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* May 8). *kf*

July 5, 2022:

Reuters reports: Unofficial representative of the Holy See warns Catholic missions in Hong Kong of difficult times ahead

According to a *Reuters* report on July 5, 2022, Monsignor Javier Herrera Corona, the Holy See’s unofficial representative in Hong Kong, has met four times with the approximately 50 Catholic missions in Hong Kong to warn them of China’s tightening control over the city. Msgr. Herrera Corona was head of the Vatican’s China Study Mission in Hong Kong until March of this year and was given a new assignment as Apostolic Nuncio to the Republic of Congo and Gabon. He had led the study mission for six years. The meetings took place from October last year, according to *Reuters*. Herrera Corona urged the missionaries to prepare for tougher times as China tightened control over the city. He urged that property, files and funds be adequately protected. *Reuters* relies on statements by four people who are familiar with the private meetings but declined to be named. Hong Kong is no longer the great beachhead it once was, said Monsignor Herrera Corona. The monsignor also warned the participants of the meeting that the rights of religious institutions outlined in Hong Kong’s Basic Law could not be relied upon in the face of increasing pressure from Beijing, according to the anonymous sources. The congregations should be prepared for possible curbs on long-standing programs, such as foreign missionaries serving as parish priests in local churches, the contacts said.

According to the report, as early as 2019, before the 2020 National Security Law came into force, the Study Mission itself had discreetly shipped out archival materials, as “they feared their mission was under close scrutiny by China’s state security apparatus.” Three religious orders also took their documents out of the country after Monsignor Herrera Corona’s warnings.

According to the official directory of the diocese, there are currently around 50 Catholic missionary societies and religious orders in Hong Kong with over 600 priests, brothers and sisters (*Reuters* July 5). *kf*

Singapore

May 29, 2022:

Archbishop William Goh nominated cardinal

Pope Francis has announced a consistory for August 27, 2022, at which he will create 21 new cardinals. Among them is William Goh Seng Chye, Archbishop of Singapore. Born in Singapore on June 25, 1957, he is only the second native bishop of the diocese. He has been Archbishop of Singapore since 2013.

Of the 5.6 million inhabitants of Singapore, 300,000 are Catholics. The proportion of Christians has increased from 12.7% of the population in 1990 to 19% in 2015. Singapore's Catholics, mostly of Chinese and Indian descent, increased from 4% in 1990 to 5.35% in 2015 (*UCAN* May 30; *Vatican News* May 29). *kf*

Authors' Abbreviations:

kf: Katharina Feith

kwt: Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

This "News Update" was first published in *China heute* 2022, No. 2, pp. 82-89 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the "News Update" refer to the year 2022.