

News Update on Religion and Church in China September 23 – December 12, 2019

*Compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, Katharina Feith,
Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle) and Barbara Hoster
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 2019, No. 4, pp. 3-19) covered the period June 28 – October 2, 2019.

Politics, Human Rights

October 24, 2019:

Detained Uyghur academic Ilham Tohti receives the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize

The European Parliament is awarding this year’s Sakharov Prize to the detained Uyghur academic Ilham Tohti in recognition of his efforts to “promote dialogue and understanding between the Uyghurs and the peoples of China.” Tohti, now fifty years old, an economist at Minzu University for Ethnic Minorities in Beijing and an advocate for the rights of the Uyghur people in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment in 2014, after being accused of inciting separatism. Tohti sees himself as a mediator between cultures. The harsh sentence handed down in 2014 is seen as a warning signal from the Chinese government to all critical intellectuals. Tohti was considered to be very well networked, including connections with Han Chinese civil rights activists. The actual award ceremony is to take place on December 18, 2019. When the award ceremony was announced in the European Parliament on October 24, President David Sassoli asked the Chinese authorities to release Tohti immediately. Sassoli described Tohti as a man who dedicated his life to dialogue between the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese in Xinjiang. He called him “a voice of moderation and reconciliation.” The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought has been awarded since 1988 by the European Parliament to people or organizations engaged in the defense of freedom of expression (dw.com Oct. 24; *AsiaNews* Oct. 25).

October 27, 2019:

New moral guidelines for China's citizens

The Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Chinese State Council have issued new guidelines for the moral behavior of all citizens, ranging from civilized behavior in public to child rearing and waste separation. The “Outline for the Implementation of Building Citizens’ Morality in the New Era” calls upon Chinese citizens to be honest and polite and requires good manners when eating, traveling or attending sporting events. The measures were proposed to help the Chinese “defend China’s honor” abroad. They are intended to help promote patriotism and formulate “national etiquette,” e.g. while singing the national anthem, raising the national flag or at the ceremony for admission to the CP. The guidelines emphasize the importance of President Xi Jinping’s thinking as the core of citizens’ morality. Compared to previous guidelines of this kind, it is striking that other Communist Party leaders such as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping are no longer mentioned. The present document is seen as a sign that propaganda work should be strengthened and the party’s specific view of Chinese tradition, particularly in the fields of culture and ethics, should be reinforced.

As a part of educating Chinese citizens in their understanding of patriotism, one must also take note of an October 31 instruction by the Chinese Ministry of Education, according to which certain textbooks are to be removed from primary and secondary schools. These include “illegal books” that run counter to Chinese law or the political direction of the Communist Party, and “inappropriate books” that do not correspond to the core socialist values (*The Guardian* Oct. 29; *Xinhua* Nov. 12).

November 24, 2019:

International Consortium of Investigative Journalists publishes leaked internal documents from Xinjiang with information about the “Vocational Training Centers”

The consortium – according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ November 24) – received the documents from Uyghurs in exile, but the original source is apparently a person in Xinjiang of unknown identity. According to the style of the language, experts believe them to be real, the SZ said, adding that they were also available to at least one Western intelligence agency which had judged them to be authentic. Several documents were signed by Zhu Hailun, head of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region Political and Legal Affairs Commission. However, according to SZ, the Chinese embassy in London has informed the British *Guardian* that the documents are “pure forgery.” The papers which generated a great deal of international media coverage and were seen as definitive evidence of the mass forced internment in Xinjiang can be found at www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/read-the-china-cables-documents. The most important of the leaked papers is a 9-page secret telegram issued by the Xinjiang Autonomous Region Political and Legal Affairs Commission (the last page is missing) entitled “Views on Further Strengthening and Standardizing the Work of the Training Centers for Vocational Skills,” from which the prison-like character of the centers is evident. In the first chapter on the security of the centers, it says that strict measures must be taken to prevent escape. In addition to security guards, patrols, video surveillance, etc., the document specifies the requirement that “dormitory doors, corridor doors and floor doors must be double locked, and must be locked immediately after being opened and closed. Strictly manage and control student activities to prevent escapes during class, eating periods, toilet breaks, bath time, medical treatment, family visits, etc. Strictly manage students requesting time off, if they really need to leave the training center due to illness or other special circumstances, they must have someone specially accompany, monitor and control them.” Ideological problems and abnormal

feelings of the students are to be assessed and solved at all times, the document says. “Training centers with more than one thousand people” require permanent specialist staff for food and hygiene control as well as for disease prevention. The document also contains information on the content of the training and the classification and rating of students. According to the document, one of the prerequisites for ending the training is “at least one year of education and training in the training center.” This is to be followed by 3–6 months of “skills training courses” for all, followed by job placement – thus the document.

Religious Policy

November 26, 2019:

Consultation on the contemporary interpretation of religious teachings and precepts in the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of the Political Consultative Conference (PCC) – Translations of canonical books must be re-examined and corrected if necessary

The exchange took place with the theme of “Using the Core Socialist Values to Lead Religions to Interpret their Religious Teachings and Precepts [教义教规] in Accordance with the Requirements of the Progress of Time.” Sixteen persons, including members of the PCC from religious circles, scholars and other religious representatives, took part in the exchange. The participation of Wang Yang, Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party, underlined the high political importance of the consultation.

In his speech, Wang Yang called for the gradual formation of a “system of religious thinking” (宗教思想体系), which has special Chinese features and corresponds to the progressive development of the times, as an ideological basis for the adaptation of religions to socialism. As stated in the report from *Xinhua*, all participants felt that “the canonical books and teachings of religions must be interpreted in a contemporary, authoritative, and correct manner to ward off extremist thinking and heresies. The existing translations of the canonical books of the religions [宗教经典] must be comprehensively evaluated and content that does not correspond to the progress of the times must be commented, corrected or re-translated as necessary.” There is need to develop a “plan for the interpretative work” (阐释工作计划), which would also take into account the peculiarities of the individual religions and avoid “lumping everything together,” the participants said according to *Xinhua*. The *Xinhua* report remarked that the responsible authorities should ensure the interpretative work through support and services.

Another report on the consultation in the PCC newspaper quoted among others Bishop Fang Xingyao, chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and vice-chairman of the Chinese Bishops’ Conference, who is reported to have said: “Love of the country is above love of religion. Chinese law is above religious precepts” (www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-11/26/c_1125277447.htm; *AsiaNews* Dec. 2; *South China Morning Post* Nov. 27; www.tyzz.people.cn Nov. 29; *Xinhua* Nov. 26).

December 12, 2019:

Conference of National Religious Organizations: With “self-confidence” “tell the story of China’s religions well”, “transforming the advantages of China’s religions into international discourse advantages”

“Tell the Story of China’s Religions Well” (讲好中国宗教故事) was the main theme of the 11th session of the Joint Conference of National Religious Organizations, i.e. of the state-sponsored umbrella organizations of the five religions plus China’s YMCA / YWCA. Wang Zuo’an, deputy minister of the Communist Party’s United Front Department and director of the National Religious Affairs Administration, attended the Beijing meeting and delivered a speech.

According to a report on the United Front Department website, the conference found that in an attempt to curb China’s rise, some foreign forces were trying to twist truth and falsehood and accuse China of persecution. According to the conference, “the Chinese people can best judge for themselves whether the Chinese religious policy and the situation of the religions are good.” The most important thing in this situation is “self-confidence” (自信), it is important not only to act well, but also to present it well, so that “people in the world understand it,” the report said. The “logic of the historical development” of China’s religions and their “unmistakable political character” against the background of socialism with Chinese characteristics must be emphasized. Compared to history and reality in the world, China’s theory and practice could be “a successful example for the international community as to how religious relationships should be dealt with,” the report remarked. The national religious organizations would have to consolidate the “Four Self-Confidences” (四个自信 [i.e. confidence in the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, in the theories, the system and the culture]) and to “effectively transform the advantages of China’s religions into international discourse advantages [国际话语优势]” – claims the report of the United Front Department (www.zyztb.gov.cn/tzyw/321265.jhtml).

At the meeting, all the leaders of the religious associations gave speeches, with Bishop Ma Yinglin, chairman of the Chinese Bishops’ Conference, speaking on behalf of Catholicism and Yanjue, vice chairman for the Chinese Buddhist Association whose chair is currently vacant, speaking on behalf of the Buddhists.

Daoismus

November 11, 2019:

Five-year plan published for the Sinicization of Daoism

After five-year plans for the Sinicization of Protestantism (March 2018), Catholicism (adopted May 2018, published October 2018) and Islam (January 2019) had already been published, the Chinese Daoist Association now also presented an “Outline of the Five-Year Work Plan on Adhering to the Orientation of Daoism towards Sinicization (2019–2023),” which was posted on its website on November 11. Like the plans of other religions, it contains a large number of the party’s political demands and political language. However, a first look at the document shows that apparently also significant interventions in the teachings and practices of Daoism, the only indigenous religion among the “five religions” of China, are planned: Traditional Daoist rules (道教戒律) should be re-ordered; provisions not in line with the times should be corrected or deleted and modern rules of conduct should be added (point 8). The clothing of the Daoist religious personnel should be standardized (point 10). Daoist practices (法务活动) should also be standardized, practices that do not correspond to the requirements of the times

should be simplified or abolished (point 11). The Daoist classics should be organized and the modern construction of a system of the Daoist teachings should be actively pursued (points 13 and 14). The text of the 坚持道教中国化方向五年工作规划纲要 (2019–2023) can be found at www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=5209&p='p'.

A project group on the “Modern Construction of a System of Daoist Teachings” had already started its work in April of 2019; see: *RCTC* 2019, No. 3, p. 7. See also the entry on the five-year plan for the Sinicization of Buddhism in the following section.

Buddhism

October 27, 2019:

The two rival Karmapas publish a common prayer for the reincarnation of the Shamarpa

The Shamarpa is an important incarnation line of the Karma Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism, headed by the Karmapa. The 14th Shamarpa died in 2014. For the current 17th Karmapa Lama, two different boys were confirmed as the reincarnation by different high-ranking lamas: Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje, born in 1983, was confirmed by the 14th Shamarpa; he came to India as a child and was trained there. Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, born in 1985, is recognized by both the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. The Dalai Lama, however, is the head of a different school of Buddhism, the Gelugpa school. Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, was trained under government supervision in the PRC but fled to India in late December 1999.

Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje had announced on October 27, 2014 that he would identify the next incarnation of the Shamar Rinpoche. That he is not doing this in conflict with the “other” Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje can be assumed from the fact that exactly five years later, on October 27, 2019, both published a joint long-life prayer for the reincarnation of the 14th Shamarpa on their respective websites. Already on October 11, 2018, both Karmapas had issued a joint declaration of intent to overcome the division in the Karma Kagyu line (the prayer can be found at: <https://kagyu.org/shamar-joint-prayer> as well as at www.karmapa.org; the announcement can be found at: www.karmapa.org/karmapa-thaye-dorje-find-reincarnation-of-shamarpa; see: *RCTC* 2019, No. 1, p. 6).

November 14, 2019:

Five-year plan for the Sinicization of Buddhism published

The “Outline of the Five-Year Work Plan on Adhering to the Orientation of Buddhism towards Sinicization (2019–2023)” was adopted on July 24, 2019 by the Standing Council of the Chinese Buddhist Association but was only posted on its website on November 14. It is significantly longer than the five-year plans of the other religions.

Among other things, it contains plans to “enrich and further develop the thinking of humanistic Buddhism [人间佛教].” The origins and lines of development of humanistic Buddhism are to be researched further; experiences from overseas are to be included while resisting wrong thinking and acting. The establishment of a system of humanistic Buddhism with teaching, canonical scriptures, spirituality, rules and liturgy is to be explored.

Another future task envisaged in the document is to provide interpretations for the teachings and precepts of the Tibetan and Theravada traditions of Buddhism that correspond to the development of China today and the excellent traditional culture of China.

The text of the 坚持佛教中国化方向五年工作规划纲要(2019–2023) can be found at www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=506&id=40672. See also the entry on the five-year plan for the Sinicization of Daoism in the section above.

Islam

December 4, 2019:

Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) rejects the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019 of the United States

After the U.S. House of Representatives passed a reinforced version of the draft law on December 3, 2019, the CIA published a statement the following day on its website, expressing outrage at what it believed to be a distorted representation and unfounded allegations of the human rights situation in Xinjiang. In Xinjiang, human rights and freedom of belief are protected, the statement said. Since the 1990s, the “three forces,” under the guise of religion, have used people’s ethnic religious feelings to stir up religious fanaticism, spread religious extremism and incite some people to commit violent and terrorist acts, thus the CIA. According to the statement, Xinjiang is the most important battlefield in China’s fight against terrorism and extremism, and Xinjiang’s Islamic circles actively participate in the work of de-extremization, by interpreting the canonical writings and the teachings of Islam and by refuting heretical theories such as “martyrs of the holy war go to heaven” or the “doctrine of the unbelievers” (www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/news/jujiaoredian/201912/04-13661.html).

Hua Chunying, spokeswoman of China’s Foreign Ministry, also refuted the bill on December 4. The draft law calls on the U.S. administration to impose sanctions on Chinese officials identified as involved in the internment in Xinjiang (*South China Morning Post* Dec. 4).

Orthodoxy

October 30, 2019:

Chinese Consul meets with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Istanbul

A Chinese government official visited the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople for the first time. The meeting took place on the initiative of the Chinese Consul General Cui Wei, who also visited the Orthodox Cathedral in the Phanar, a district of Istanbul, on this occasion. Bartholomew I explained to the guest the history of the patriarchy and its function for the Orthodox Churches all over the world and also informed him about the Orthodox metropolis in Hong Kong. Cui outlined Chinese religious policy to the honorary head of world orthodoxy and invited the patriarch to visit China. Bartholomew agreed to this as soon as he received an official invitation from the Chinese government. According to *AsiaNews*, observers see the visit of the Chinese Consul General as an anti-Russian note, since the Chinese viewed the Patriarch of Constantinople as a possible counterweight to the Russian Patriarch of Moscow (*AsiaNews* Nov. 1).

Protestantism

September 23, 2019:

“Code of Conduct for Protestant Church Personnel” adopted

The two umbrella organizations of the Protestant Church in China, the Chinese Christian Council (CCC) and the Three Self Movement (TSPM), adopted a catalog of nine rules of conduct, which church ministers must commit to by signing. Under the leadership of the party, they must dedicate themselves voluntarily to cooperation in the expansion of socialism with Chinese characteristics and follow the course of Sinicization, resist infiltration from the outside and use the medium Internet in a self-disciplined manner. The text of the code of conduct entitled 中国基督教教牧人员行为规范 was published at www.ccctspm.org/cppccinfo/12833. A complete German translation of the code of conduct can be found in *China heute* 2014, No. 4, pp. 227-228.

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

November 11–12, 2019:

Amity Printing Celebrates 200 Millionth Bible

The Amity Foundation's Nanjing printing house, founded in 1986, celebrated the printing of the 200 millionth Bible. So far Bibles have been printed in over 130 languages and dialects, including 85 million for the Chinese market. The anniversary took place with the participation of over 200 guests from church and society, including many international guests from Africa. Amity set up the Amity Printing Africa Service Center in Ethiopia in 2015, and the Amity Printing Kenya Corporation in summer 2019. On the occasion of the anniversary, the print shop showed an exhibition of historical gospel books and Bibles in Chinese. Bishop Hans-Jürgen Abromeit from the [German Evangelical] Northern Church represented the German Bible Society as second chairman. Pastor Dr. Christian Wollmann, head of the Center for Mission and Ecumenism at the Northern Church, was asked to speak as a representative for all foreign guests (<http://en.ccctspm.org> Nov. 29. Personal report C. Wollmann).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

November 21–22, 2019:

Meeting exchanges ideas about linking “meeting points” (house churches) to established, registered churches

The Chinese Christian Council (CCC) and the Three Self Movement (TSPM) organized a two-day training course in Qingdao with an exchange of experiences on strategies for connecting non-registered meeting points or house churches to registered congregations (“以堂带点”). After the opening by TSPM chairman Xu Xiaohong, CCC President Wu Wei gave the introductory speech, in which he explained the active connection of unregistered meeting points to registered communities as a necessary next step in the implementation of the new Regulations on Religious Affairs. “As long as they have a pure faith and do no activities that endanger the state or society, they are our brothers and sisters that we should serve,” said Wu. 70 church employees in leadership positions in various provinces and cities then heard exemplary local reports in the plenum before they exchanged ideas in small groups. On the second day, there were visits to various Christian house churches in Qingdao, which have already joined registered congregations. At the closing, Pastor Wu Wei emphasized the function of CCC and

TSPM as a link between believers on the one hand and party and government on the other (www.ccctspm.org Nov. 25).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

December 9, 2019:

Pastor Wang Yi detained for one year

Wang Yi, leader of the Rainbow Covenant House Church in Chengdu, is still in custody after his arrest on December 9, 2018, but has so far been unable to speak to his lawyer. He has not yet been finally sentenced. Conjectures assume a prison sentence of up to 10 years. A parish presbyter, Qin Defu, was sentenced to four years in prison in late November. The reasons for arresting Wang Yi included his open criticism of Xi Jinping's personality cult and religious politics. Wang's wife Jiang Rong and her son are under house arrest (*AsiaNews* Dec. 3; see *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 9-10).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

October 28, 2019:

Public ordination in Mindong without Bishop Guo Xijin

Bishop Zhan Silu of Mindong in Fujian ordained two deacons to priests in the absence of his Auxiliary Bishop Guo Xijin, one for his own diocese and the other for Minbei. It was the first public ordination in the Mindong Diocese in 70 years, according to *AsiaNews*. In December 2018, the bishop Guo Xijin, who was not recognized by the government, yielded his office at the request of the pope to the former illegitimate bishop Zhan Silu, who had been pardoned by the pope, but Guo was not recognized by the government as an auxiliary bishop. In May 2019, due to constant pressure from the authorities on his underground priests, he had withdrawn his application for state recognition. A priest told *AsiaNews* that Bishop Guo had been invited by the government to attend the ordination but felt that he was unable to do so until his priests' situation improved. "I must take care of these unofficial priests and faithful. This is the specific task that the Holy See has given me," *AsiaNews* quoted Bishop Guo.

On November 13, 2019, *AsiaNews* reported that since November 9, pressure has again been exerted on Bishop Guo to join the "independent" (official) clergy. A few dozen Mindong underground priests had already signed the document supporting the "independence" of the church, but are criticized by believers, *AsiaNews* said; there is confusion in the diocese (*AsiaNews* Oct. 30; Nov. 13; see *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 11-12, 16; No. 3, p. 13; No. 4, p. 13).

October 31, 2019:

In the diocese of Handan, believers are unable to withstand church demolition

In the early morning of October 31, hundreds of believers gathered with their priests outside the church in Wugaozhuang (Guantao County, Handan, Hebei Province) to protest against the government ordered demolition of their church. In an appeal for help to the Churches of the world, the faithful asked for prayer. Wugaozhuang belongs to the official Church, but is said not to have obtained all the permits required for its construction. This is repeatedly used as an argument for demolishing churches.

As *AsiaNews* writes, local believers did not see the Sino-Vatican agreement of September 2018 as the direct cause of this persecution, but the deal has made government authorities more powerful. They claimed that “the Vatican supports us.” In Wugaozhuang, an agreement was finally reached with the government representatives that the church may be rebuilt elsewhere with financial support from the government. – According to statements by believers in the Handan Diocese, another 40 churches are listed for demolition by the authorities (*AsiaNews* Oct. 31; *UCAN* Nov. 4; persecution.org Nov. 4).

November 19, 2019:

***AsiaNews*: Lightning rod instead of Christ figure on church in Shandong**

A statue of Christ the King attached to the top of the church in Linjiazhuang (Jinan, Shandong Province) was removed by the authorities and replaced with a lightning rod. This was done as a further measure to “Sinicize” the Catholic Church, said *AsiaNews*, and was in line with the attempt to remove visible signs of Christianity more and more. Numerous crosses, which up to now were often visible from afar, were removed from church towers or church facades in many places; this particularly affects the provinces of Zhejiang, Henan, Xinjiang, Shanxi, Hubei and Guizhou, as *AsiaNews* reported on November 19.

November 20, 2019:

Death of Bishop Andrew Jin Daoyuan, Diocese of Changzhi

Bishop Jin, who died at the age of 90, was born on June 13, 1929 to a Catholic family in Lucheng District in Changzhi, Shanxi Province. After studying in various seminaries, including that of Beijing, he was ordained a priest in Beijing in 1956. In the same year he returned to Changzhi for pastoral work. He was arrested during the Cultural Revolution and spent 13 years in prison until 1979. The following year he was appointed pastor of the Nantiangong Church and in 1992 Vicar General of Changzhi Diocese. Bishop Jin was ordained bishop in Beijing in 2000 without papal permission, but in 2008, at his request, Pope Benedict XVI. recognized him. However, the Vatican did not assign a diocese to him. The current bishop of Changzhi is Peter Ding Lingbin, who was ordained bishop in 2016 with the approval of the Vatican and the Chinese government. Bishop Jin was buried in Nantiangong village on November 26 (*UCAN* Nov. 25).

Sino-Vatican Relations

November 11, 2019:

Congolese professor from Taiwan named undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

Xaverian Missionary Father Batairwa Kubuya Paulin, originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and fluent in Chinese, is a professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei and executive secretary of the Commission for Interreligious and Ecumenical Dialogue of the Regional Episcopal Conference of Taiwan. According to Sr. Beatrice Leung Kit-fun from the Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages in Kaohsiung, the appointment of P. Paulin is

groundbreaking. So far, no representative of an Asian Church has been appointed to such a position in the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, she said. Father Paulin could contribute to the understanding of the Chinese Church. Fr. Paulin has lived in Taiwan for many years. In May 2019 he accompanied a delegation of the Buddhist Association from Taiwan to Rome, where they also met with Pope Francis (*UCAN* Nov. 19; *Vatican News* Nov. 11).

November 19-26, 2019:

Journey of Pope Francis to Thailand and Japan – References to China

On the flight from Thailand to Japan, the Pope sent the usual greeting telegrams to the governments over the respective territories, including China's President Xi Jinping, Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam, and Tsai Ing-wen, President of the Republic of China (Taiwan). *UCAN* reported that Catholics from the PRC traveled to Thailand and Japan to see the Pope. It said that Thai media had spoken of a strong presence of Chinese Catholics at the Mass in the National Stadium in Bangkok and of travel groups of Chinese Catholics in Bangkok who came to see the Pope. The Catholic website *Xinde (Faith)* published numerous reports from *Vatican News* about the Pope's trip. The joint official website of the Patriotic Association and the Chinese Bishops' Conference did not report on the trip (www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-11/pope-francis-telegrams-flight-thailand-japan.html; *UCAN* Nov. 24).

November 26, 2019:

Pope Francis at the press conference on the return flight from Japan to Hong Kong and China – China's response

During the press conference, the telegram to Carrie Lam was mentioned in a question to the Pope and he was asked what he thought of the situation in Hong Kong.

The telegrams were sent to all heads of state when they entered the territories, which was an automatic process and should only be understood as a courtesy, the Pope replied. He continued: "With regard to the other question you asked me: when we think about it, it's not just Hong Kong. Think about Chile, think about France, democratic France: a year of yellow jackets. Think of Nicaragua, think of other Latin American countries that have problems like this, and even some European countries. It's something general. How does the Holy See handle this? It calls for dialogue, for peace. But it's not only Hong Kong, there are various problematic situations that I am unable to evaluate at the moment. I respect peace and I ask for peace for all these countries that have problems, Spain too. It is better to put things in perspective and to call for dialogue, for peace, so that problems can be resolved." To the question when he would travel to Beijing, he said: "I would like to go to Beijing, I love China."

On November 28, Geng Shuang, spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was asked at a press conference about his reaction to the Pope's statement; he said: "We saw the reports and appreciate the Pope's friendliness and goodwill. China and the Vatican City State have good communication between us, and we are pleased of the improvement in our relations. China is sincere and active in advancing China-Vatican relationship. We welcome and are open to exchange between the two countries" (www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191126_voloritorno-giappone.html; www.fmprc.gov.cn Nov. 28).

December 8, 2019:

Philippines' Cardinal Tagle appointed head of "Propaganda Fide"

Pope Francis has appointed Cardinal Luis Antonio Gokim Tagle, Archbishop of Manila, to head the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in Rome (formerly known as "Propaganda Fide"). The Vatican announced this on December 8. The 62-year-old Tagle will take over his new position in mid-January 2020 as the successor to the 73-year-old Cardinal Fernando Filoni, who has been head of the Congregation since 2011. Tagle is the second Asian in this position after Cardinal Ivan Dias (2006–2011) of India. The congregation is primarily responsible for the Churches in Africa, Asia and Oceania. Cardinal Filoni was appointed future Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Cardinal Tagle was born in Manila in 1957 to a Catholic family and ordained a priest in 1982. His father belonged to the local Tagalog ethnic group, his mother was of Chinese origin. He studied in Manila, Washington and Rome and is today, among other positions, also president of Caritas Internationalis and the Catholic Biblical Federation. Pope Benedict XVI. made him a cardinal in 2012. As *Vatican News* writes, the "charismatic Filipino, whom some call the 'Asian Francis', is one of the most distinguished members of the College of Cardinals. He has made a name for himself primarily through social initiatives and impulses for evangelization." The cardinal is considered a gifted communicator and has hosted various television programs in the Philippines. He is said to be very close to Pope Francis and to share his vision of a missionary Church and of care for the poor. According to Paolo Affatato, Asia Editor at *Fides*, and Fr. Bernardo Cervellera PIME, editor-in-chief of *AsiaNews*, Cardinal Tagle's appointment could be helpful in negotiations with Mainland China, thus *Crux Now* (*Crux Now* Dec. 10; *America Magazine* Dec. 8; *Vatican News* Dec. 8).

Hong Kong

October 23, 2019:

Jesuits assume leadership of the Centre for Catholic Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

In a simple ceremony that took place on October 23, 2019, the centre, which is part of the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, passed into the hands of the Jesuits. Prof. Anselm Lam, the new director, emphasized that reconciliation will be an important study topic of the centre, "hoping to make a positive contribution at a time when reconciliation is very much needed in Hong Kong's socially divided society" (*AsiaNews* Nov. 1).

Hong Kong, Protests

October 12, 2019:

Cardinal John Tong addresses "all Hong Kong friends" on Hong Kong's RTHK radio station

In his speech at the RTHK, the cardinal spoke of his pain at the worsening situation in the unrest in Hong Kong. However, he is convinced that God will accompany the citizens of Hong Kong through these difficult times. He advised the audience, of whom he said he knew that most were not Christians,

to remember at difficult moments how they had weathered previous challenges and to speak with friends. He warned them to keep a grip on hope because disappointment and anger lead to hatred, which gradually consumes the ability to distinguish between good and evil and leads to violence. We all have the same origin, nature and dignity, Cardinal Tong said. He called for the rebuilding of mutual respect and trust. He urged the government to listen to the “cry of Hong Kong citizens” and to respect the law (<https://app3.rthk.hk/special/pau/article.php?aid=3722>; www.asianews.it/news-en/Card.-Tong-appeals-against-violence:-Restore-hope-and-trust-48254.html; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Oct. 18).

October 20, 2019:

Police splash blue-dyed water on Kowloon Mosque

Police used water cannons to spray water containing blue dye on protesters at an unauthorized rally, hitting the entrance to the mosque on Nathan Road twice in the process. As the *South China Morning Post* reported, the police immediately contacted the main imam and leader of the Muslim community and said in a Facebook post that the water cannon “accidentally affected the entrance and front gate of the mosque.” The Muslim Council of Hong Kong also published a statement on Facebook in the evening, calling on Hong Kong’s Muslims to “seek calmness over revenge, wisdom over emotions and unity over division.” According to the newspaper report, passers-by, including demonstrators, helped clean the dye stains from the entrance to the mosque. The incident caused mixed reactions among Hong Kong’s Muslims, the newspaper said. Around 300,000 Muslims live in Hong Kong, among whom are 50,000 Chinese, 150,000 Indonesians and 30,000 Pakistanis (*South China Morning Post* Oct. 20; 2016 census data from Wikipedia).

October and November 2019:

Calls for prayer and prayer meetings for Hong Kong (selection)

On October 21, Hong Kong Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha on Facebook reiterated calls for prayer, urging the faithful to pray the rosary during the month of October and finish with the intention: “Mary, untier of knots, pray for us!” In the same Facebook entry, he also wrote that he was impressed by an exchange of Catholic youth with the entire Hong Kong diocesan leadership on October 19 and called for an independent commission of inquiry [into the violence].

On October 26, 300 people took part in a public rosary prayer for Hong Kong in Chater Garden; the prayer meeting was organized by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Hong Kong. Auxiliary Bishop Ha said in his address: “God can help us realize that everyone is human, not cockroaches, dogs or yellow objects.” As *UCAN* explained, pro-government groups often call demonstrators “cockroaches,” while demonstrators call police officers “dogs.”

On November 11, once again in the Chater Garden, a Christian prayer meeting for the student Chow Tsz-lok took place. Chow had died on November 8 after allegedly falling from a parking garage deck four days earlier while fleeing from the police (*AsiaNews* Oct. 21.; Nov. 11; *Catholic News Agency* Oct. 23; ucanews.org Oct. 28).

November 11, 2019:

Statements on arrests at the site of Hong Kong's Holy Cross Church

On November 11, police broke into the grounds of Holy Cross Church in Sai Wan Ho and arrested protesters in its parking lot who had fled to the church grounds after a clash with the police. The diocese of Hong Kong issued a statement on the same day expressing deep regret for the incident, pointing out that churches today differ from those of the past: "Today, there is no way for a church to guarantee that those who enter it will not be arrested according to the law." According to the *Sunday Examiner*, the Holy Cross parish apologized in its own statement that they could not prevent the police from entering their premises. The parish condemned the excessive force used by the police, and released pictures from the surveillance cameras in the parish parking lot. On November 12, the parish said it had set up a legal team to follow up the issue and to protect the rights of those who were arrested (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Nov. 11, 12).

November 8 and 12, 2019:

Christian churches in Hong Kong are referred to as "rioters" by mainland media

In an article dated November 8, 2019, the news portal www.people.com.cn, which belongs to the party newspaper *Renmin ribao*, accused Hong Kong Christian churches of being the instigators of the unrest that would have turned the "Fragrance Harbor" 香港 into a "Chaos Harbor" 乱港. The Christian-run 285 primary schools and 235 middle schools used brainwashing to influence their students in a pro-western and anti-Chinese way, so that they had yellow skins but white hearts, the article said. It criticized the churches as "petrol stations" for the protesters, providing them with drinks, food and medicine. The best mirror for the current events in Hong Kong is the revolution in Poland in 1980, in which the Vatican's support for the Solidarność trade union played a similar role, the article claimed. It concluded by saying that it is time to scrape out the churches of Hong Kong [as once scrapes out an ulcer] ("香港的教会, 是时候刮骨疗毒了!") (<http://hm.people.com.cn/n1/2019/1108/c4227231445458.html>).

Four days later, the video channel China Youth Studio 青微工作室 uploaded a contribution entitled "Religion or Politics," in which Christian groups are described as the most active instigators of political turmoil. The Catholic Bishop Joseph Zen and the Protestant theology professor Ying Fuk-Tsang are mentioned as troublemakers and the Hong Kong Methodist Church as an evil shelter in which protesters are equipped for their illegal activities. The churches are accused of manipulating public opinion, acting politically through mass prayer meetings and inciting hostility to the People's Republic (www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZi78vywUPU).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Between November 11 and 29, 2019:

Violent clashes between police and students at Chinese University, siege at Polytechnic University

In two days of clashes beginning November 12, the police attacked students on the Chinese University campus with tear gas, rubber bullets, and pepper spray while the students for their part threw stones

and Molotov cocktails. On November 13, *AsiaNews* published a statement by university teachers, employees, students and alumni accusing the police of shooting at the university president with tear gas immediately after the university president had tried to mediate, and refusing to agree to a ceasefire. Beginning November 17, police besieged Polytechnic University, which had been occupied by hundreds of protesters, including many minors; on November 19, about 100 people were still trapped on campus. In the course of the siege, which was finally ended on November 29, more than 1,100 people were arrested or, if minors, identified and registered by the police.

Religious leaders offered to act as mediators (see the following entry). *AsiaNews* reported that on the evening of November 12, an urgent message of Catholic Auxiliary Bishop Ha spread via Facebook in which he urged the police to stop and asked the students to take care of their safety and life. On November 18, he, together with pro-democratic members of the Legislative Council, tried unsuccessfully to mediate with the police chief at Polytechnic University (*AsiaNews* Nov. 12, 13, 19, 30; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Nov. 18).

November 18, 2019:

Colloquium of Six Religious Leaders of Hong Kong releases urgent appeal regarding conflict escalation at Polytechnic University

The religious leaders demand:

“1. All parties should suspend all kinds of force. 2. Protesters who stay in the university, including the injured, should be allowed to leave campus immediately. 3. Protesters should stop using force, while on-site police force should make reasonable and legal arrangements and let the people leave the campus peacefully. 4. Police force and protesters should attempt to mediate and settle the issue in a peaceful way.” The religious leaders also agree to send representatives to mediate and resolve the crisis if necessary (see: www.examiner.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/eng.pdf).

The Colloquium of Six Religious Leaders of Hong Kong, which has existed for 40 years, is made up of the six leading representatives of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Islam, Protestantism (Hong Kong Christian Council) and the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. In connection with the protests in Hong Kong, they last published joint statements on October 12 and November 13, 2019.

November 24, 2019:

Pro-democratic camp wins overwhelming victory in Hong Kong district council elections

With an unusually high turnout of 71%, the pro-democratic camp tripled its number of seats and gained control of 17 of Hong Kong's 18 districts. All pro-Beijing parties suffered major drops in votes. The local elections have been rated as a de facto referendum on the ongoing protests by many commentators. On December 8, once again 800,000 people (police estimate: 183,000) carried out a mostly peaceful protest against the government and on behalf of the “five demands.” The crowd included Cardinal Joseph Zen and several Catholic priests. According to *AsiaNews* (Dec. 9), over 6,000 people, including many minors, have been arrested in Hong Kong in recent months in connection with the protests. The *South China Morning Post* reported that there were those among the Christians who were calling for the Churches to take a stronger stand against the protesters' violence (*AsiaNews* Nov. 25; Dec. 9; *South China Morning Post* Nov. 16; Wikipedia).

This “News Update” was first published in *China heute* 2019, No. 4, pp. 214-220 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the “News Update” refer to the year 2019.