

News Update on Religion and Church in China November 11, 2019 – April 18, 2020

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The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2020, No. 1, pp. 3-16) covered the period September 23 – December 12, 2019.

Politics, Law, Human Rights

December 15, 2019:

New government provisions on internet ecology aim at the spread of positive energy

The purpose of the new regulations is to create a “positive online ecosystem” in which “positive energy” is promoted (§ 1 and 2). The provisions distinguish three types of information: “desired,” “illegal” and “negative” (literally: “not good,” *buliang* 不良). In particular, content is encouraged that spreads Xi Jinping’s thoughts and party policies, helps to guide the public in forming agreement, promotes responsibility and goodness or increases the international influence of Chinese culture (§ 5). Included under “illegal” information are threats to national security, incitement to terrorism, extremism and ethnic hatred but also “content harming the nation’s honor and interests” and the “dissemination of rumors.” “Content undermining the nation’s policy on religions, or promoting cults and superstitions” is also included (§ 6). Negative content to be prevented includes sensationalizing, “content that has sexual innuendo,” “content that might lead minors to imitate unsafe behaviors or behavior that violates social mores, or that induces bad habits for minors, that seduces young people,” as well as “improper comments on natural disasters, major accidents, or other disasters” (§ 7). The “Provisions on the Governance of the Online Information Content Ecosystem” 网络信息内容生态治理规定 were enacted by the State Internet Information Office on December 15 and came into force on March 1, 2020 (English translation and the original are available at: www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/provisions-on-the-governance-of-the-online-information-content-ecosystem).

The concept of maintaining an ecological balance is also used in Chinese religious theory and politics. Several Catholic webmasters in mainland China interviewed by *UCAN* expressed concern about the new regulations (*MERICs China Update* 2020, No. 5; *UCAN* March 6, 2020).

December 28, 2019:

China abolishes “custody and education” measures for sex workers and passes “community correction” law

The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress has passed two legislative innovations designed to reduce detention in prisons or other institutions. According to the MERICS research institute, such measures had been repeatedly called for by the UN. Under the now abolished provisions for “custody and education” (*shourong jiaoyu* 收容教育), sex workers and their clients could have been detained in so-called education centers for up to two years, where, according to the *BBC*, they also had to do forced labor. This punishment could be imposed by the law enforcement authorities (police) without trial – similar to the “re-education through labor” (*laojiao* 劳教), which was abolished in 2013. However, prostitution continues to be illegal in China.

The “community correction” (*shequ jiaozheng* 社区矫正) is a penal system outside the prison, in the community, i.e. the neighborhood community (*shequ*) where the convicts reside. The new law on community correction will take effect on July 1, 2020. According to *Xinhua*, “community correction targets criminals who were sentenced to public surveillance, given a reprieve, released on parole, or permitted to temporarily serve their sentences outside prison.” The decision on this is made either by the people’s courts or correctional services or public security organs. The first pilot programs had already started in 2003 (*BBC* Dec. 28, 2019; MERICS *China Update* 2020, No. 1; *Xinhua* Dec. 28, 2019; www.chinalaw-translate.com/community-corrections-law-2/?lang=en; see also *RCTC* 2015, No. 1, p. 15).

January 1, 2020:

Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) passes ethnic unity law

The “Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region” 西藏自治区民族团结进步模范区创建条例 were adopted by the People’s Congress of the TAR. The norm, which takes effect on May 1, “makes it clear that Tibet has been an inalienable part of China since ancient times,” commented the party-affiliated *Global Times*. The document designates September as the publicity month for ethnic unity and progress in Tibet (§ 25). Religion is mentioned several times: Religious organizations, sites for religious activities and assembly and institutes for religious education should practice Sinicization and respect other religions and non-believers (§ 19). The religious authorities are to instruct religious organizations, sites for religious activities and institutes for religious education to educate religious personnel in a progressive way of thinking about ethnic unity, legal awareness as well as minority and religious policies, and to consciously reject infiltration by foreign religious forces (§ 30). Tibetan groups in exile feared that the law would further undermine Tibetan national and cultural identity (*Global Times* Jan. 1, 2020; *Radio Free Asia* Jan. 15, 2020; the document can be found online at http://tibet.news.cn/ywj/2020-01/15/c_138705916.htm).

January 8, 2020:

Falun Gong publishes number of adherents killed in China in 2019

According to the Minghui Falun Gong Network, 96 Falun Gong practitioners died in China in 2019 due to persecution by the authorities, of whom 19 died in prisons, detention centers or police stations. Most of the deaths, according to Minghui, were recorded in Shandong Province (16), followed by Hei-

longjiang (11) and Liaoning Province (10). According to Minghui (www.minghui.org Jan. 8, 2020) a total of 4,363 Falun Gong followers have been killed for their beliefs over the past 20 years. The numbers cannot be checked independently.

The Falun Gong meditation movement, based on traditional Qigong, has been banned in China since July 22, 1999, and is being actively suppressed by the authorities as an “heretical cult.”

February 6/7, 2020:

Li Wenliang, Ophthalmologist and “whistleblower” dies in Wuhan

Ophthalmologist Li Wenliang, one of the first doctors in China to draw attention to the outbreak of the novel SARS-CoV-2 virus at the end of December 2019, has himself died as a result of the disease in the central hospital in Wuhan, capital of Hubei Province. His death provoked national outrage and grief because Li was initially warned by the local police against “spreading rumors.”

Li Wenliang reported on December 30, via the popular WeChat news service, to a group of eight colleagues about patients with SARS-like respiratory disease. On January 3, he was detained by the security authorities and forced to sign a document that he “was seriously disrupting public order.” He continued to work in the hospital treating COVID-19 patients until he himself was diagnosed with the disease in January.

The news of Li’s death spread on social media on the evening of February 6 and was announced by official press outlets such as the *Global Times* and *People’s Daily*, but was withdrawn shortly thereafter. Instead, it said Li was in critical condition and was being treated in intensive care. His death was finally confirmed in the early hours of February 7.

In many reactions to Li Wenliang’s death, the doctor was declared a martyr and an “everyday hero.” On the night of his death, many of the residents of Wuhan, who had already been curfewed, took part in an appeal to commemorate the deceased doctor: they switched off the lights in their apartments and agreed to a whistle concert. In an open letter on the Internet, some Chinese academics argued that Li Wenliang’s day of death should be declared “Freedom of Speech Day” so that Li would not have died in vain. Protests of this type on the Internet were immediately deleted by the censorship authorities.

According to an official investigation by the Beijing National Supervisory Commission, Li Wenliang was cleared posthumously in March of earlier allegations of spreading rumors. The police in Wuhan apologized to his family for treating Li badly. Critical voices, among whose was that of the lawyer Xu Baolu, bemoaned the fact that no investigation has ever been carried out into the laws that made such police action possible in the first place. According to Nicholas Bequelin, regional director of Amnesty International, the incident provides tragic proof of how Chinese authorities suppress vital information. Li, 34, from Liaoning Province in northeast China, leaves behind a wife and five-year-old son. His wife is expecting their second child in June.

Among the notable tributes to Li Wenliang is a folk song by the blind singer Liu Hongquan in Shaanxi Province, which mourns the doctor’s death with the following verses: “... First they sealed your lips, oh brother, then they sealed the city. [...] Now that the whole nation has awakened, oh brother, you are already far away” (*AsiaNews* Feb. 7, 8, 2020; *MERICs China Update* 2020, No. 3; *Sixth Tone* Feb. 1; March 19, 2020; *StephenJones.blog* Feb. 15, 2020; *UCAN* March 24, 2020).

February 15, 2020:

Arrest of human rights activist Xu Zhiyong

In Guangzhou, the anti-regime lawyer Xu Zhiyong was arrested during a health checkup as part of the corona epidemic. Xu published an indictment against Xi Jinping on February 4, entitled “Chairman Xi, it’s time to go.” In it he accuses the head of state and of the party of, among other things, mismanagement of the Corona crisis, the trade war with the United States and the pro-democratic protests in Hong Kong. In general, he accuses Xi of political inability and lack of a comprehensive vision. When Xu Zhiyong published his open letter, he was already in hiding. His current arrest is not the first; he was arrested in summer 2013 for his commitment to political reform and human rights and sentenced to a four-year prison sentence in January 2014. 46-year-old Xu previously worked as a law lecturer at Peking University and is one of the co-founders of the “New Citizens’ Movement,” which campaigns against corruption and in favor of China’s peaceful transition to a constitutional state. In connection with the criticism of the restrictive information policy of the Chinese government in the Corona crisis, further arrests of Chinese civil rights activists, journalists and bloggers have also been reported (*Asia-News* Feb. 18, 2020; *ChinaFile* Feb. 26, 2020; MERICS *China Update* 2020, No. 4).

February 17, 2020:

Various Western newspapers publish a list leaked from Xinjiang containing detailed information on 311 people sent to the “Vocational Training Centers” for re-education

According to the newspapers involved – including the *Financial Times*, *New York Times* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* – as well as the researcher Adrian Zenz, who carried out the evaluation, the document is a list with the heading “Students sent to re-education [who are] family members of those who went abroad and have not returned.” Those 311 persons listed were sent to the training centers. Alongside each name, there are the person’s ID card data, the reason for their being sent to the camp and information about his / her “three circles” (family members, friends and neighbors – again with personal data and brief assessment – as well as each one’s religious situation). Another column contains recommendations as to whether or not the stay in the training center should be continued. All 311 on the list originate from the district of Qaraqash (Karakax) (hence the name “Qaraqash List” in the media); the dates of their arrival at the re-education camps lie between 2017 and March 2019. The document is a PDF file without the head of any authority or other information as to its provenance. Attempts were made to check the document’s authenticity by comparing the IDs provided with other known data and by interviewing relatives of the persons listed who are currently living abroad. Zenz’s analysis showed that the most common reason for being sent to a re-education facility was violation of birth control policies, followed by “untrustworthy” and other reasons categorized by Zenz as being “religion-related.” In one available section of the list, among the reasons for re-education are: “1. Wife used to wear veil; 2. four children over the quota.”

The party-affiliated *Global Times* described the list as fake and stated that the majority of the people on the list have never even been to a training center (*Global Times* Feb. 23, 2020; MERICS *China Update* 2020, No. 4; *New York Times* Feb. 17, 2020; *UCAN* Feb. 24, 2020; www.jpolorisk.com/karakax [Zenz’s report]). – For the so-called “China Cables” leaked in November 2019 about the re-education centers in Xinjiang, see *RCTC* 2020, No. 1, pp. 4-5.

Religious Policy

From January 23, 2020:

All religious sites in China are closed due to the COVID-19 epidemic

Since about Chinese New Year (January 25) – various media use January 23 as the deadline – the cult sites of all religions across China have been closed to prevent contagion with the new Corona virus. Collective religious activities are not allowed. This was done by order of the government authorities. The official bodies of the five religions issued corresponding notices, such as the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference on January 24. The institutes for religious education, such as theological seminaries or Buddhist academies, have also been closed and the start of studies has been postponed indefinitely. These measures, officially called “Two suspensions and one postponement” (双暂停一延迟), still applied at the end of April, and it is uncertain when they will be lifted (chinacatholic.cn Jan. 24, 2020; gov.cn April 8, 2020). More information on this and on how the religious communities are dealing with the situation can be found in *China heute* 2020, No. 1, pp. 4-10 (in German).

February 1, 2020:

“Measures for the Administration of Religious Groups” take effect

The “Measures for the Administration of Religious Groups” (宗教团体管理办法) are detailed provisions of a section of the revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs” that have been in force since February 2018. So far, there have been no separate provisions on “religious groups” (宗教团体 – which refers to the five official umbrella organizations of the recognized religions), whose key role in state supervision over religious affairs has been expanded in the revised “Regulations.” Parts of the new legal norm correspond to what is already laid down in the overarching “Regulations” or in the statutes of the various associations of the five religions (such as the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association). However, they also contain further intensification that goes far beyond them. Thus, the new measures oblige the religious groups to “educate and guide religious professionals and religious citizens towards supporting the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system” (§ 17), they should also “complete mechanisms for rewards and punishments of religious professionals” (§ 23). Also new is the extensive list of competences that the religious affairs departments of people's governments have towards religious groups (§§ 25-27). These include the supervision of religious groups in formulating their own system of rules. This, in turn, as it already says in the “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” must be observed by the institutes for religious education, the sites for religious activities and the clergy. Approval by the authorities must be obtained for “holding major meetings, activities, trainings, as well as carrying out diplomatic exchange activities.” Also noteworthy is the provision that “Religious groups must not set up regional branches” (§ 14). Yang Fenggang from the Center for Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University told *China Source* that the associations of the religions at different administrative levels (province, county) are not branches of the nationwide associations, but separate associations that are responsible to the local authorities.

The new measures were adopted by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (text of the “Measures” and unofficial English translation at www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/measures-for-the-administration-of-religious-groups; *AsiaNews* Dec. 31, 2019; *China Source Blog* Feb. 2, 2020; *UCAN* Jan, 3, 2020; see also *RCTC* 2019, No. 4, p. 7 regarding the draft of the “Measures”).

February 13–17, 2020:

China's United Front Department of the Chinese Communist Party publishes figures on Corona donations from religious circles

In five reports on the contributions of the five major religions in the fight against the Covid-19 epidemic, the following figures are given: By around mid-February, Buddhist circles had donated 207 million yuan, Daoists 50 million yuan, Muslims 86.09 million yuan, Catholics 12.8 million yuan and the Protestants 115.3 million yuan. In addition, donations totaling 60 million yuan (including pledged donations) were collected from the Protestant-inspired Amity Foundation. Religious organizations also provided large amounts of donations in kind – millions of face masks, hundreds of respirators and oxygen devices, plus protective suits, disinfectants, etc. (*Tongzhan xinyu* 统战新语 [United Front] according to sara.gov.cn Feb. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 2020). - See also further information in the sections on Protestantism and Catholic Church as well as the contributions in *China heute* 2020, No. 1, pp. 4-10 (in German).

Buddhism

January 2, 2020:

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) announces closure of Buddhist study network founded by the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy

In what appeared to be a surprise announcement, on December 30, 2019 Khenpo Sodargye announced the closure of the Bodhi Institute (Puti xuehui 菩提学会, Bodhi Institute of Compassion and Wisdom) which he had founded and which has branches in China and other countries. In a Chinese-language post that appeared on his Larung Gar website (ICT published a screenshot), Sodargye justified this by saying that, in recent years, some people have allegedly undertaken illegal and criminal activities in the name of the Bodhi Institute. He stated that he would dissolve the Bodhi Institute and all of its “Dharma Dissemination Offices” and that all branches and groups established in the name of the Bodhi Institute should suspend and discontinue their websites. He declared that he would continue to “love the nation as well as the religion” and serve the faithful.

A source confirmed the closings to the ICT, but said the reasons provided by Sodargye were apparently written at the direction of the authorities. The source continued that Sodargye and another Abbot of Larung Gar were interrogated by the authorities in November 2019 and that the closure was related to these interrogations. ICT, which described Sodargye as one of the leading Tibetan Buddhist voices within the PRC, suspected that the closing of the centers was intended to limit his growing influence. Sodargye (Sönam Dargyé, Chinese: Suodaji 索达吉), born in 1962, was a close student of the founder of the Larung Gar Academy, Jigme Phuntsok, and since the latter's death in 2004 has been a member of the team of abbots that continues the work of the academy. As Ester Bianchi of the University of Perugia, who did research in Larung Gar, wrote in an article published in 2018, Sodargye is responsible for teaching Chinese monks there. In 2006 he founded Puti xuehui, which aims to spread Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese and has developed into a network of Buddhist groups and individuals throughout China [and, according to the ICT, also internationally]. At khenposodargye.org you can find reports about Sodargye's trips abroad, most recently from 2018, when he traveled to Africa, Europe and the USA. There are many videos of Khenpo's instruction to well-filled auditoriums abroad, including videos where he lectures in Chinese to Chinese audiences.

Larung Gar is located in Sertar County, Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. In 2016–2017, over 4,800 people were expelled from the academy, where around 10,000 followers of Tibetan Buddhism (including many Han Chinese) were living and studying before 2016 (savetibet.org Jan. 2, 2020; see Ester Bianchi, “Teaching Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese on Behalf of Mañjuśrī” in F. Jagou [Ed.], *The Hybridity of Buddhism. Contemporary Encounters between Tibetan and Chinese Traditions in Taiwan and the Mainland*, Paris 2018, pp. 109-131; see also *RCTC* 2016, No. 4, pp. 3-4, und 2017, No. 4, pp. 8-9).

Protestantism

December 26, 2019:

Pastor Wang Yi sentenced to nine years in prison

On December 26, Pastor Wang Yi, director of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, who was critical of the regime, was sentenced to 9 years in prison in a closed trial. The date coincides not only with Christian Christmas, but also with the birthday of state founder Mao Zedong and can be understood as a demonstration of the prevailing ideology. In addition to the prison sentence, Pastor Wang's rights as a citizen were revoked for a period of three years and personal items worth the equivalent of 6,500 Euros were confiscated. The verdict was justified with the charge of “inciting the overthrow of state power” and “illegal trade in religious printed matter.” His wife Jiang Rong is under house arrest together with their son. After a large-scale raid and arrests in the church community, most of the members were quickly released. In November of 2019, Qin Defu, a church leader from the Early Rain Covenant Church, was sentenced to four years in prison for “illegal business” (*New York Times* Dec. 30, 2019; *UCAN* Jan. 3, 2020).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

January, March and April 2020:

Removal of crosses in Anhui Province

Local authority officials dismantled crosses of Christian churches in Anhui Province, including in the capital Hefei (January 9), in Woyang 涡阳 (March 13), Bangbu 蚌埠 (end of March), Fuyang 阜阳 (April 1) and Feixi 肥西 (April 15). The demolitions are being justified with the demands of the Sinitization process. Religions are supposed to jettison any foreign influences and all symbols that are foreign to Chinese culture. Reports of attacks and restrictions by local authorities are also increasing in other provinces. The Xiangbaishu Church was completely demolished on March 13 in Yixing, Jiangsu Province. On Easter Sunday, April 12, the Antioch Church was banned in Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan (boxun.com Jan. 9, 2020; chinaaid.net March 15, 2020; christiantimes.org.hk March 27, 2020; cmcn.org/archives/47997).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

January 21, 2020:

Germany: Workshop held on the sect “Church of Almighty God” using social networking

In response to user questions by adherents of the “Church of Almighty God” (CAG) on social networks such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, Jens Haverland, ecumenism pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in northern Germany, organized a workshop at Hansebarcamp on January 21, 2020 under the title “Help, a sect is following me.” The new religious movement which arose in the mid-1990s in China and is also known under the name “Eastern Lightning,” since 2015 manifests itself more and more also in Germany. So far, there is a certain accumulation in Protestant communities and refugee accommodation around the cities of Stuttgart and Esslingen in South Germany.

Because they share certain common elements with Christianity, the sect’s missionary efforts are often directed towards parishes and clergy. But, and in this the doctrine differs fundamentally from Christianity, the followers of “Almighty God” believe that Jesus has come back in the form of a young woman and that the end time is imminent. The focus of the proclamation is not the Good News of the liberating Gospel, but the subordination of one’s own needs in the face of the struggle between “Almighty God” and the demons. In publications and especially in YouTube videos, reports are given on how Jesus revealed himself and how his followers are persecuted by the Chinese police, who is identified as an “apocalyptic red dragon.”

Reports from former members describe the group’s approach and how it led to social isolation. In their missionary activities, the members of the “Eastern Lightning” do not initially pretend to be missionaries as such, but usually try to build good relationships and collect information over years before they begin to do missionary work. They pretend to be Christians of the house church movement, who are politically persecuted because of their beliefs. The sect is also organized in Germany in the “Association for the Defense of Human Rights and Religious Freedom.” In Stuttgart’s city center the sect tries to build up trust among the public by presenting their concerns alongside the human rights violations in Xinjiang.

“I find it questionable if, for example, representatives of the North Church knowingly or unknowingly follow CAG profiles with their Twitter account,” said Haverland. “At first I found it difficult to block someone based on a different worldview. But I also don’t want to be misused to be part of a network that obviously stresses the relationship between Christianity and the Chinese state rather than promoting human rights” (nordkirche.de/nachrichten/nachrichten-detail/nachricht/session-hilfe-mir-folgt-eine-sekte-am-beispiel-church-of-almighty-god/).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

From January 25, 2020:

Amity Foundation contributes to fight against Corona

On January 20, the Amity Foundation began collecting data and facts about the novel Corona virus and its spread in Hubei province. The Amity team began discussing initial considerations about what form their relief efforts could take. Only four days later, even before the start of the Chinese New Year on January 25, the first transport of aid materials was underway. By March 12, products had been delivered to more than 300 hospitals, medical centers and village communities, including seven ambulance vehicles with vacuum cabins for the safe transport of infected people. Aid teams distributed more than 130,000 meals to medical personnel on the front line. With the help of online fundraising, support from local companies, Chinese churches and foreign partners, Amity raised the equivalent of almost 10 million Euros in donations by March 23. In the meantime, requests for help have also come from abroad (www.amity.org.cn; www.amityfoundation.org/eng/coronavirus-updates-amitys-work-march). See also the report by Martin Lachmann, Amity Office Hong Kong, dated March 18, 2020).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

February 17, 2020:

Party praises the commitment of Protestant Christians

On its microblog on February 17, the CCP's United Front Authority published a positive response to efforts by Chinese Protestant churches and organizations to help curb the virus. It gave special emphasis to the fact that the rapid and comprehensive willingness of Protestant Christians to help was in accord with the guidelines of President Xi Jinping. It was also praised that the churches had given sober, scientifically clear information about dealing with the virus, opposed rumors and denied interpretations that the virus was a sign of "sin" or even the beginning of the "end time." By February 16, the Chinese Christian Council and the Three-Self Movement have made a total of almost 16 million Euros in donations of money and goods available at the local and national level. The donations of the Protestant churches in the most affected Hubei Province alone amounted to 2.25 million Euros. At that time, the Amity Foundation had raised an additional 8 million Euros in cash and in-kind donations (*Tongzhan xinyu* Feb. 17, 2020).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

March 17, 2020:

Protestant umbrella organizations warn of the new religious movement Shincheonji

On March 17, the website of the Protestant umbrella organizations CCC / TSPM published a call for the defense of true Christian teaching and resistance to heretical cults. Above all, the Church of the "New Heaven and New Earth" from South Korea (Shincheonji Church of Jesus) took advantage of the special circumstances of the Corona epidemic to become active among Chinese believers and to attract new followers. The spread of the new virus in South Korea in connection with a representative of this sect, who continued to attend services despite confirmed infection, is damaging the image of Christian communities, thus the website. The criteria according to which the orthodox teaching of Christianity is to be distinguished from new religious movements are explained (www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/13229).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

November 11–13, 2019:

6th Theological Forum on Sinicization of Catholicism in Chengdu

The forum was themed "The Sinicization of Catholicism – How do we do it?" 140 people from all over China, including (non-Church) experts, priests and laity, took part, according to the official conference report on the website of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and Bishops' Conference. According to the report, after the opening speeches, there was a "top five religions talk about Sinicization," each with a high-level representative of the national organizations of Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism as well as Zhuo Xinping, chairman of the Chinese Association of Religious Studies. The next day there were numerous lectures by university and Church scholars on the subject of "Merging Catholicism and Chinese Culture." The morning session on November 13 dealt with the subject of "Sinicization of Catholic Architecture and Art" and was held at Chengdu Cathedral, which has an area of courtyards and outbuildings in traditional Sichuan style (the church itself is classicist).

There followed a session on “Sinicized Catholic preaching.” In a “sermon exchange,” selected priests from 12 provinces showed “how Catholic clerics [...] interpret Catholic teachings and regulations in a subtle and quiet manner in accordance with Chinese society and culture.” The report does not reveal anything about the content of the lectures.

One priest who attended the conference told *UCAN* that the forum had a political mission, there were few lectures on theology and many on political issues. Another participant named Paul told *UCAN* that in a discussion on Sinicization the viewpoint had been taken that priests should not wear vestments when raising the national flag and singing non-Church songs. Most priests, however, would have favored a Sinicization of Catholicism, he continues (*chinacatholic.cn* Nov. 16, 2019; *UCAN* Nov. 21, 2019).

December 18, 2019:

Working report of the official Catholic governing bodies for 2019 speaks of holding on to the independence of the Church

At a meeting of the standing committees of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and the Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) in Jinan (Shandong), Bishop Ma Yinglin, chairman of the BCCCC, presented the working report of the bodies for 2019. According to a report on the CCPA-BCCCC official website, Bishop Ma said that in the 70th year of the founding of the New China, CCPA-BCCCC, led by the party and government and guided by Xi Jinping’s thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, had completely implemented the spirit of the 19th Party Congress and the 2nd, 3rd and 4th plenary sessions of the 19th CCP Central Committee; studied the major discourses of Secretary General Xi Jinping on religious work; effectively communicated and implemented the revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs”; upheld the flag of love for country and religion; adhered to the principle of independence and self-government of the Church and orientation towards Sinicization; achieved good results in strengthening the ideological construction, the systemic construction, the personnel training, the welfare organizations and the exchange with foreign countries. These achievements were rated positively by the leaders at all levels, Ma continued. Mr. Liu Yuanlong, vice chairman of the CCPA, presented the 2020 work plans. Bishop Shen Bin, vice-chairman of CCPA and BCCCC, promised at the meeting that the bodies, led by the party and government and in the light of the Holy Spirit, would continue to abide by the principles of patriotism, Church independence, Sinicization, etc. Representatives of the Party’s United Front Work Department attended the meeting (*chinacatholic.cn* Dec. 18, 2019).

End of 2019 / Beginning of 2020:

Pastoral mottoes for 2020 in various Chinese dioceses – Focus on families and the Bible

A “Year of Marriage and Family” was proclaimed in 2020 in Zhouzhi Diocese (Shaanxi). As diocesan Bishop Wu Qinjing said in a pastoral letter, there are many difficulties in marriages and families: family conflicts and breakups, divorce and remarriage, domestic violence, older single people who cannot find a spouse, support for older people in the family and the problem of the children left behind. The life of the Church depends heavily on how they deal with these problems in their families, the bishop said. The Nanjing Diocese proclaimed a year of Bible study, inaugurated on November 17. As Diocesan Bishop Lu Xinping explained in an interview with *Xinde*, among others Bible groups would be set up in all parishes and would meet at least twice a month. The Diocese of Xingtai in Hebei, which currently

has no bishop, declared in a pastoral letter that 2020 would be the “Year of Matthew,” referring among others to the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis “*Aperuit illis*,’ Instituting the Sunday of the Word of God” (*Xinde* 2019, No. 44, p. 1; 2020, No. 1, pp. 1-2).

However, with the outbreak of the Corona epidemic and the continued closure of all religious sites, the implementation of these diocesan plans may prove to be extremely difficult.

January 20, 2020:

***AsiaNews* reports the temporary release of Underground Bishop Cui Tai**

The 69-year-old coadjutor bishop Augustinus Cui Tai from Xuanhua (Hebei Province) was released, according to some priests, to spend Chinese New Year with his sister. After the New Year holidays, the police would return the bishop to isolation, the priests said. Since 2007, Bishop Cui again and again has been held in secret detention centers or hotels or put under house arrest by the authorities without trial. Most recently, he was “taken away” on March 29, 2019 (*AsiaNews* Jan. 20, 2020; see also *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 15-16).

January to April 2020:

Developments in the Diocese of Mindong

According to *AsiaNews*, at least five parish churches in the diocese, the majority of whose clergy and believers originally belonged to the underground, were closed by the authorities during the month of January. Their electricity and water had been turned off, allegedly for reasons of fire protection. According to *AsiaNews* these include two very large parishes, Fu’an with over 10,000 believers and Saiqi with 3,000 faithful, as well as the Shuangfeng parish. A Catholic home for the elderly was also closed in Saiqi. Fu’an’s parish priest Liu Guangpin and Saiqi’ parish priest Huang Jintong had to leave their parish work. According to *AsiaNews*, Fr. Huang was “taken away” by security forces on April 3 and taken to an unknown location – presumably to convince him to sign a government-demanded declaration of Church independence. According to *AsiaNews*, he is one of about 20 of the diocese’s originally 57 underground priests who have so far refused to sign such a declaration. The former underground bishop, Bishop Guo Xijin, also received an eviction order from his bishop’s house on January 15. However, according to *AsiaNews*, in order to avoid bad publicity, the authorities finally refrained from driving him out of the residence. Since then (as of April 6) he has lived there without running water, electricity and gas. When he leaves the house to fetch water, he blesses his controllers by means of the security camera (video at *AsiaNews*). Some priests told *AsiaNews* in January that the authorities had kept Bishop Zhan Silu of Mindong in the dark about eviction orders from Bishop Guo’s residence and the parishes.

Meanwhile, on the web portal of the Patriotic Association and the Bishops’ Conference again and again there are reports about political meetings in the official part of Mindong Diocese. On January 20, the deputy chairman of the Political Consultative Conference of the city of Ningde which is located in the area of the diocese wished Bishop Zhan Silu for the New Year “even more success in working for [Church] unity.” On March 25, a religious policy training session took place in the residence of the bishop, in which 50 priests, sisters and lay people, as well as representatives of the authorities took part in addition to the bishop. The meeting was chaired by Vicar General Zhu Ruci – who, according to the *Guide to the Catholic Church in China 2014*, originally belonged to the underground community of the diocese (*AsiaNews* Jan. 16; April 6, 2020; *chinacatholic.cn* Jan. 20; March 27, 2020).

In December 2018, at the request of the Pope, Bishop Guo Xijin, who was not recognized by the government, has accepted to be demoted in favor of the former illegitimate Bishop Zhan Silu, who had been pardoned by the Pope. Despite this, Bishop Guo continued to be denied recognition by the government as Zhan's auxiliary bishop. In May 2019, due to constant pressure from the authorities on his underground priests, Bishop Guo finally withdrew his application for state recognition. The diocese was seen as a kind of pilot project for the implementation of the September 22, 2018 Sino-Vatican agreement on the appointment of bishops (see *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 11-12; 16; No. 3, p. 13; No. 4, p. 13; 2020, No. 1, p. 10).

From January 25, 2020:

Jinde Charities starts donation campaign for Corona-virus aid in China

Many parishes and dioceses in China, but also Catholic and non-Catholic individuals participated in the fundraising. Between January 25 and April 23, 15,285,944 yuan, nearly 2 million Euros, were raised in donations for disaster relief within China, according to the website of Jinde, the largest Catholic aid organization in mainland China. On January 28, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Bishops' Conference called on all Catholics in the country to donate to fight the epidemic, either through the Red Cross, through Jinde or directly to their local church (*chinacatholic.cn* Jan. 28, 2020 ; www.jinde.org/Project/show/id/4200.htm [Project Wuhan]).

From March 11, 2020:

Jinde Charities starts overseas aid project to fight the pandemic



On April 14 the China-Zentrum in Sankt Augustin, Germany, has received thousands of protective masks and some protective gear for the infirmaries and old-age homes of the Divine Word Missionaries. From left to right: Sr. Marinka, Fr. Liebscher, Sr. Ivana, Fr. Welling, J. Bewermeier, Paul Li. Photo: China-Zentrum.

By April 23, around 8.4 million yuan (1 million Euros) had been raised in donations and 12.3 million yuan (1.5 million Euros) had been disbursed in aid for countries abroad, according to Jinde's website. The aid went to South Korea, Italy and other countries affected by the epidemic. Two aid deliveries to Italy, sent from China on March 16 and 26, were made through the Vatican Pharmacy with the support of the responsible Chinese and Italian authorities (www.jinde.org/Project/show/id/4212.html; [overseas project]; jinde.org March 16, 17, 18, 27; April 3, 2020).

For details and further appeals for donations, see the contributions in *China heute* 2020, No. 1, pp. 4-10 (in German).

March 25, 2020:

Bishop Ma Zhongmu, the only Mongolian-born bishop in the world, dies at 100



Bishop Ma Zhongmu wearing his Mongolian bishop's hat. Photo: nxpeteryu.

Bishop Ma Zhongmu 马仲牧 (Mongolian name: Tegusbeleg) was bishop of the Diocese of Ningxia in northwest China from 1983 to 2005; however, he was only recognized by the government as a priest. He was the oldest living bishop in China. Ma Zhongmu was born on November 1, 1919 in the community of Chengchuan (Mongolian: Porobalgason, Otog Front Banner, Ordos) in Inner Mongolia. He came from a traditionally Catholic Mongolian family of 12 children. His older brother Ma Yuanmu 马元牧 (1906–1979) was also a priest and three of the girls in the family became religious sisters. Ma Zhongmu studied philosophy and theology in the seminaries of Suiyuan (Hohhot) and Datong. On July 31, 1947 he was ordained a priest by Bishop Charles Joseph van Melckebeke CICM. From 1948 he studied for two years at the agricultural faculty of Fu Jen Catholic University in Peking. He then worked as a pastor and later as a lecturer in Suiyuan's seminary. In 1958, together with many other priests in Suiyuan, he was declared a counter-revolutionary and sent to the labor camp. He was not rehabilitated until 1979. In 1980 he returned to the diocese. In 1983, he was secretly ordained Bishop of Ningxia. Since his retirement in 2005, he has lived, during the last years gravely ill, in his home town of Chengchuan.

Two bishops remain in the region after Bishop Ma's death: Bishop Li Jing of Ningxia and Bishop Du Jiang of Bameng (Bayan Nur Banner, Inner Mongolia). Both are recognized by the Pope and the government. The Bameng Diocese, in which also Chengchuan is located, formerly belonged to the Ningxia Diocese. As in many areas of China, Vatican and [official] Chinese diocesan borders do not match. The administrative functions of the three bishops had overlapped and the Catholics had each gone to the bishop to whom they felt they belonged, Hong Kong Catholicism expert Anthony Lam told *UCAN*. There were also occasions when the three bishops performed together, such as for the ordination of an ethnic Mongolian priest in Chengchuan in 2013. According to Lam, Bishop Ma had a good relationship with the local authorities who respected him.

As *UCAN* reported, only Bishop Meng Qinglu of Hohhot and two priests and a few lay people were allowed to attend Bishop Ma's funeral on March 27. The religious authority justified this restriction by citing the measures in force to contain the Corona virus.

Bishop Ma Zhongmu was the only bishop of Mongolian ethnicity in the history of the Church in China. In photos you can see him with Mongolian clothes and a Mongolian hat with a cross. He translated the Mass texts into Mongolian and submitted them to the Vatican, where – according to various obituaries – until now they could not be approved due to the lack of experts in the Mongolian language at the Vatican.

Tibetan Buddhism is the most widespread religion among the Mongols. Most Mongolian Catholics of Inner Mongolia live in the Otog Front Banner district, where Chengchuan is also located (*AsiaNews* March 26, 2020; Blog Jinan yongren 冀南庸人 March 27, 2020; *China heute* 2008, No. 6, pp. 197-198 [in German]; *RCTC* 2013, No. 2, pp. 15-16; 2013, No. 4, p. 7; facebook.com/UCANChina March 26, 2020; *UCAN* March 27, 2020).

Sino-Vatican Relations

January 8 / February 26 / March 1, 2020:

Cardinal Zen's call to all cardinals around the world to save the Chinese Church leads to open confrontation with the Dean of the College of Cardinals

Cardinal Joseph Zen SDB, bishop emeritus of the Diocese of Hong Kong, had already written an initially unpublished letter to his fellow cardinals around the world on September 27, 2019. In it he expresses his concern that the “Pastoral guidelines of the Holy See concerning the civil registration of clergy in China” published by the Holy See on June 28, 2019 (English text see <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2019/06/28/190628c.html>; see also *China heute* 2019, No. 2, pp. 72-73, 87-88 [in German]) encouraged the clergy and faithful in China to be members of a schismatic Church that was independent from the Pope and obedient to the communist party. Among other things, he criticizes the statement (attributed by Zen to Cardinal Parolin) made in the Pastoral Guidelines that “independence” of the Church in China after the agreement, since it recognizes the special role of the Pope, is no longer to be understood as absolute. Zen’s appeal to the cardinals ends with the words: “Can we assist silently to this complete destruction of the Church in China at the hand of those who have the sacred duty of protecting it?” Cardinal Zen added his “Dubia” (critical analysis) to the Pastoral Guidelines, which he according to his own words had already presented to Pope Francis on July 1, 2019. On February 26, 2020, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, the Dean of the College of Cardinals, replied to the cardinals of the world with a letter saying that he felt obliged “to share some considerations and to offer some elements which favor a serene evaluation of the complex questions regarding the Church in China.” In particular, he points to a “profound symphony” in attitudes towards the Church of China in the last three pontificates, all of which have favored dialogue. Cardinal Re rejects Zen’s conjecture that the agreement signed in 2018 is the same that Pope Benedict refused to sign; rather, according to Re, after research in the archives of the Secretariat of State, he became convinced that “Pope Benedict XVI had approved the draft Agreement on the appointment of Bishops in China, which was only possible to sign in 2018.” Cardinal Zen responded on March 1 with an open letter to Cardinal Re. In it he explains, among other things, that John Paul II and Benedict XVI both regarded a policy of compromise against communism in the sense of the “Ostpolitik” as wrong. Zen also added that if he is wrong in his assumptions about the agreement, then someone should show him the text. Zen further wrote that he had evidence that Cardinal Parolin was “manipulating” the Holy Father. “A dialogue between the two cardinals about the Sino-Vatican agreement is urgently needed,” wrote Bernardo Cervellera, editor-in-chief of *AsiaNews*, on March 3 in a comment (<https://oldyosef.hkdavc.com/?p=1264>; <https://oldyosef.hkdavc.com/?p=1400>; www.asianews.it/news-en/Card.Re-against-Card.-Zen:-There-is-a-profound-harmony-between-Benedict-XVI-and-Francis-on-China-49452.html; <https://oldyosef.hkdavc.com/?p=1356>).

January 26, 2020:

Pope Francis prays for Corona victims in China

“I also wish to be close to and to pray for the victims of the virus that has broken out in China. May the Lord receive the deceased in his peace, comfort the families and support the great commitment of the Chinese community, which has already been set in motion to fight this epidemic,” said the Pope after the Angelus prayer in St. Peter’s Square (w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2020/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20200126.html).

February 3, 2020:

News: Vatican sends hundreds of thousands of medical masks to China

At the initiative of the Office of Papal Charities and the Missionary Center of the Chinese Church in Italy, “hundreds of thousands” of masks were sent to China in the particularly affected provinces of Hubei, Zhejiang and Fujian, the Holy See Press Office reported on February 3. (The exact number is unclear; other reports mentioned 600,000 or 700,000 masks.) According to *AsiaNews*, the Holy See and Chinese Christian communities in Italy had paid for the masks, the Vatican Pharmacy had organized collection and shipment, and China Southern Airlines had taken charge of transporting them for free. One of the organizers was the priest Vincenzo Han Duo from Mindong Diocese, who is currently the vice-rector of the Pontifical Urban College in Rome. He was interviewed by the party-affiliated *Global Times*, which also reported in detail on February 3 about the Vatican donation (*AsiaNews* Feb. 3, 2020; *globaltimes.cn* Feb. 3, 2020; *UCAN* Feb. 4, 2020; *vaticannews.va* Feb. 3, 2020).

February 14, 2020:

The “Foreign Ministers” of China and the Holy See meet on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference

Commentators described this as the highest-ranking meeting between representatives of both sides since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (according to Bernardo Cervellera in *AsiaNews* it was the highest-ranking meeting since the expulsion of the Papal Nuncio Riberi in 1951). Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States within the Holy See’s Secretariat of State, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had both traveled to Munich to attend the Security Conference. On the same day, the press office of the Holy See published a press release on the encounter. It says: “During the discussion, which took place in a cordial atmosphere, the contacts between the two Parties, which have developed positively over time, were evoked. In particular, the importance of the *Provisional Agreement on the appointment of Bishops*, signed on 22 September 2018, was highlighted, also reiterating the wish to continue bilateral institutional dialogue to promote the life of the Catholic Church and the good of the Chinese people. Appreciation was expressed for the efforts that are being made to control the coronavirus epidemic, along with solidarity with the afflicted population.” The text continues: “Finally, the hope was expressed for greater international cooperation in order to promote civil co-existence and peace in the world, and considerations were exchanged on intercultural dialogue and human rights.” A day later, there was a Chinese-language announcement on the Chinese side from the official *Xinhua* news agency, which also appeared on the website of the Chinese State Council. There it was said, among other things, that Gallagher, on behalf of the Pope and the Secretary of State [i.e. Cardinal Pietro Parolin], conveyed the respect and support of the Curia to the Chinese side and said that it is believed that “China has the wisdom and courage to overcome the epidemic soon.” Wang Yi, *Xinhua* said, thanked the Curia for their expression of sympathy and said he believed that the Vatican would “play a constructive role in promoting the international community in order to support China’s efforts to fight the epidemic with an objective, rational and scientific attitude.” *Xinhua* continued: “Wang Yi said Pope Francis has repeatedly expressed his love and blessings for China. Today’s first meeting between the Chinese and Vatican foreign ministers opens up more space for future exchanges between the two sides. The provisional agreement on the appointment of bishops signed by both sides has been a groundbreaking event with positive results.” China would be ready to further improve understanding with the Vatican. The meeting of the foreign ministers was thus recognized

by the Chinese official press far more extensively than, for example, the conclusion of the provisional agreement in 2018.

The semi-official *Global Times* also reported on the meeting. The paper quoted Catholicism expert Wang Meixiu (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) as saying that cooperation in the health sector had obviously enhanced bilateral relations between the two sides. Such friendly cooperation would also be helpful for the renewal of the agreement. Francesco Sisci from Renmin University of China told the newspaper that the meeting between the two foreign ministers might lead to a higher level meeting between the two sides (Vatican report: <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/02/14/200214d.html>; announcement *Xinhua*: www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2020-02/15/content_5479216.htm; *America Magazine* Feb. 14, 2020; *AsiaNews* Feb. 15, 2020; *Global Times* Feb. 15, 2020).

April 1, 2020:

Statement by Cardinal Charles Bo, Archbishop of Yangon (Myanmar), blames China's Communist Party for the Corona pandemic

The Chinese Communist Party regime has prime responsibility for the pandemic, the Cardinal wrote in his sharply worded statement. He justified this with the initial suppression of news about the virus and action taken by the Chinese government against anyone who raised the alarm. His country Myanmar is extremely vulnerable to Covid-19, said the Cardinal. "Through its inhumane and irresponsible handling of the coronavirus the CCP has proven what many previously thought: that it is a threat to the world," Bo wrote. The Chinese regime – not the people – "owes us all an apology, and compensation for the destruction it has caused," said the Cardinal; at least it should write off the debts of other countries to cover the cost of Covid-19. In his letter, he also denounced violations of freedom of expression and religion in China and the incarceration of at least one million Uighurs in camps.

The 71-year-old Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, a Salesian, was appointed Cardinal by Pope Francis in 2015. He is the current chair of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). However, the statement did not appear on their website or in their name, but on the website of the Archdiocese of Yangon (www.catholicarchdioceseofyangon.com/newview.php?id=94; *UCAN* April 15, 20, 2020; *Vatican News* April 3, 2020).

April 9, 2020:

Holy See Press Office expresses gratitude for medical supplies from China

Matteo Bruni, director of the Holy See Press Office, said: "In recent days, donations of medical supplies have arrived from China, in particular through the organisations of the Red Cross Society of China and the Hebei Jinde Charities Foundation, to the Vatican Pharmacy as an expression of the solidarity of the Chinese people and Catholic communities with those involved in the relief of those affected by Covid-19 and the prevention of the current coronavirus epidemic. The Holy See appreciates this generous gesture and expresses its gratitude to the bishops, the Catholic faithful, the institutions and all other Chinese citizens for this humanitarian initiative, assuring them of the esteem and prayers of the Holy Father" (<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/04/09/200409b.html>).

Hong Kong

From January 23, 2020:

Measures taken by the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese regarding the Corona virus

After the diocese published detailed sanitary requirements for Church services on January 23, it suspended all public Sunday and weekday masses from February 15. This regulation was still in effect at the end of April. Sunday and weekday Masses, rosary, angelus, vespers and other prayers are broadcast via YouTube, Facebook or Instagram. The churches are open for private prayer, weddings and funerals can be held. Cardinal John Tong, the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese, addressed the faithful several times. In the Lenten pastoral letter of February 11, he wrote: “Since last June, the entire Hong Kong society seems to be living in the wilderness, losing its confidence and feeling sad and helpless. Firstly was the turmoil triggered by the ‘anti-extradition bill’ movement, and then the panic caused by the spread of the epidemic virus. When temptations seem to be overwhelming us, it is an opportunity for us to turn our gaze to Christ and renew our trust in him”(catholic.org.hk Jan. 23, 2020; *Sunday Examiner* Feb. 6, 21; April 7, 10, 2020; video speeches of Cardinal Tong Jan. 31; Feb. 13, 2020).

February 16 / April 18, 2020:

Xia Baolong appointed Director of the State Council’s Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office – Arrest of 15 Pro-Democracy activists

Xia is considered to be closely associated with Xi Jinping and a political hardliner. From 2003 to 2017 he worked in Zhejiang Province, initially as deputy party secretary under the then party secretary Xi Jinping, and from late 2012 as party secretary. During Xia’s tenure, between 2014 and 2016 around 1,600 crosses were forcibly demolished from church roofs in Zhejiang. His appointment as head of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO) is seen as an indication that the central government wants to get a firmer grip on Hong Kong’s administration and politics after mass protests had broken out there against the Beijing-related administration under Carrie Lam in the summer of 2019. On April 18, 2020, Hong Kong police arrested 15 prominent pro-democracy activists, including lawyer Martin Lee, MP Albert Ho and media entrepreneur Jimmy Lai, editor of the pro-democratic *Apple Daily*, for organizing and participating in unauthorized protests; all were later released on bail. According to *UCAN*, there are also concerns that Xia’s appointment could affect Christian life in Hong Kong. However, this would depend on the degree of threat the central government perceives from Christians in the island city, Porson Chan from the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Diocese told *UCAN* (*AsiaNews* March 4; April 19, 2020; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* April 20, 2020; *UCAN* Feb.14, 28, 2020). – The HKMAO is an agency of the Beijing central government which maintains liaison offices in both Hong Kong and Macau.

Macau

December 20, 2019:

20th anniversary of the former Portuguese colony of Macau’s return to China

Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a speech in Macau to mark the anniversary. In it, he said that the people and government of Macau have always been patriotic and really understood the concept of “one

country, two systems.” They had the nation’s and Macau’s interest in mind, he said. Xi praised Macau’s economic success and patriotic education in schools. He said that the sense of national identity has been deeply rooted in the heart of young people.

Macau has been a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China since December 20, 1999 (*AsiaNews* Dec. 20, 2019).

Taiwan

March / April, 2020:

Taiwan donates respirators and tuna to the Vatican

On March 23, Taiwan’s Ambassador to the Holy See, Matthew Lee, made a donation of 600 cans of tuna to the Office of Papal Charities for distribution to the poor. Taiwan also donated 280,000 face masks to the Holy See and later another 200,000. At a ceremony held on April 22 at the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to mark the second donation, the Vatican’s Chargé d’Affaires in Taiwan, Msgr. Arnaldo Catalan, thanked Taiwan for the donation and conveyed Pope Francis’ best wishes to the Taiwanese people.

More than 20,000 people in Taiwan responded to an appeal by the Camillian missionary Fr. Giuseppe Didone on April 2 and within just 5 days donated NTD 120 million, or about 3.7 million Euros, to the Italian areas hardest hit by the Corona virus (*focustaiwan.tw* April 22, 2020; *taiwantoday.tw* April 8, 2020). – For the situation of the religions and of the Catholic Church in Taiwan in the pandemic, see W. Boehi’s contribution in *China heute* 2020, No. 1, pp. 10-11 (in German).