

News Update on Religion and Church in China May 3 – October 4, 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. 2, pp. 3-20) covered the period November 11, 2019 – April 18, 2020.

Politics, Society, Human Rights

August 30, 2020:

Despite fewer job opportunities due to COVID-19, Chinese migrants remain in the cities

According to a study published on August 30 by the Beijing Social Work Development Center for Facilitators, 63% of China’s 290 million migrant workers want to stay in cities, even if job opportunities there have deteriorated due to the Corona virus. The reason they gave was the even poorer income opportunities available in the countryside. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the average monthly income in rural areas was around 1,000 Yuan in 2018, while a migrant worker in the city could earn around 3,700 Yuan.

According to the study, 58.84% also said they would definitely stay in the city because of better educational opportunities for their children. Rural migrant workers are the group most affected by the effects of the Corona virus pandemic. Even though many of them have lived in cities for years, they have limited access to health care and schools as they are usually still registered in their villages of origin.

The results of the study differ from data broadcast by state television (*CGTN China Global Television Network*). According to this source, by the end of July the provincial governments are said to have created 13 million new jobs for migrant workers returning from the cities. On August 8, the Ministry for Human Resources and Social Security reported that there were 178 million migrant workers in the cities at the end of June, 97.3% of the number in the same period last year (*AsiaNews* Sept. 2).

August 30, 2020:

Human rights organization: Between 2013 and 2020, almost 30,000 people detained in “Residential Surveillance in a Designated Location”

“Residential Surveillance in a Designated Location” (指定居所监视居住, RSDL) is a special form of pre-trial detention that has existed since 2013. According to the Criminal Procedure Act (Article 75), it is provided for suspects if the crimes concern national security or acts of terrorism. As the organization Safeguard Defenders (SD) writes in its study entitled *Rampant Repression* published on August 30, 2020, RSDL gives the police the opportunity to detain people *incommunicado* and in secret locations outside of regular prisons without a court order for up to six months. The relatives, or in the case of foreigners the government of the country concerned, could be refused information about the whereabouts of the detained persons. According to the SD, these cases are to be assessed as “forced disappearances.” Access to legal counsel could also be denied, which often happens, the organization said. Using Chinese court judgment databases, the SD study found 29,110 people who were temporarily detained in RSDL between 2013 and 2020, with a clear upward trend. The actual number of cases is certainly higher, since the databases only contain cases in which a court judgment was later reached, the organization said. According to the SD, the police also use RSDL against people who have come to the attention of the authorities for political reasons, such as civil rights lawyers, journalists and NGO employees, who are often charged with endangering national security. In a number of cases, the police also use RSDL as a punitive measure, without charge or trial following RSDL detention; in some cases, the legal maximum of 6 months in RSDL detention is exceeded, and it is not uncommon for detained people to experience further psychological and physical abuse – the SD study notes.

For party members and state employees, there has been a separate detention system similar to the RSDL called *liuzhi* 留置, which is subordinate to the “National Supervisory Commission” set up when the constitution was changed in 2018.

Safeguard Defenders was founded in 2016. Director of the organization is the Swede Peter Dahlin (*LICAS* Aug. 31; <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/publications>). See also *RCTC* 2016, No. 1, pp. 12-13; 2016, No. 2, pp. 15-16; 2018, No. 2, p. 4.

September 1, 2020:

Inner Mongolia: Protests against increased Sinicization in schools

In the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in the north of the PRC, thousands of students and parents protested against a textbook change in numerous cities. As was already the case in Xinjiang and Tibet since 2017, at the beginning of the school year on September 1, the first year in elementary and middle schools were to have several core subjects – Chinese language and literature, history and “Ethics and Law” – with uniform new textbooks in Chinese. These classes are no longer taught in Mongolian. They involve “subjects in which up to now a lot of Mongolian culture has been conveyed via the Mongolian language and writing,” said the German TV program *Tagesschau* of September 8. The authorities have taken massive action against the school strikes and protests. Public service employees whose children take part in the school strike were threatened with dismissal and striking students were threatened with expulsion from school. Online censorship has been greatly expanded. There have been several arrests. The government had justified the move with the “gradual expansion of bilingual schooling to give ethnic minorities more opportunities as well as ‘improving the recognition of the Chinese nation,’” according to Merics quoting the *Global Times*.

There were also expressions of solidarity with the protesters in the independent Mongolian state (*Global Times* Sept. 7; *LICAS* Sept. 2; *Merics China Briefing* Sept. 10; *tagesschau.de* Sept. 8).

Religious Policy

May 21–27, 2020:

Assembly of the Political Consultative Conference of the Chinese People

As always, delegates from the five religions also took part in the meeting, which was postponed to this date due to the Corona pandemic. On the Catholic side, these were the bishops Fang Xingyao, Ma Yinglin, Shen Bin, Zhan Silu, Lei Shiyin, Li Shan, Meng Qinglu, the priests Wang Yaosheng and Wu Jianlin and the layman Liu Yuanlong. Bishop Lei, one of the seven bishops legitimized by the Pope in September 2018, said in an interview with the National Religious Affairs Administration's magazine *Zhongguo zongjiao* that after reports from delegates from Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong and the army, he realized that China was facing unprecedented risks and needed a stable social environment more than ever. He also said he had led the Catholic Patriotic Association to adhere to the principle of independence (chinacatholic.cn May 29; *Weixin zongjiao* [WeChat account of the National Religious Affairs Administration] May 26).

From June 2, 2020:

Gradual reopening of religious sites after the epidemic has been contained

Beginning on June 2, the first religious and popular religious sites were allowed to reopen in many provinces, subject to preventive measures. It often took much longer for all registered religious sites in a region to open – in Shanghai's Qingpu District, for example, all 35 religious sites in the district were not operational again until August 2. In Zhejiang, the provincial government mandated that each site should fly the Chinese flag and teach a patriotic lesson when it reopened. June 7, 2020 was the first Sunday that Catholic churches were open again for worship in most provinces. However, there were also many limitations. It was reported from Catholic communities that local authorities – in Shenyang, for example – not only monitored compliance with the preventive measures, but also prevented minors from attending Church services and did not allow underground churches and meeting places to open at all after the epidemic phase (*AsiaNews* June 8; facebook.com/UCANChina June 3; Aug. 20; mzb.com.cn June 9; mzzj.sh.gov.cn Aug. 20; *UCAN* June 4; Aug. 21). See also the article in *China heute* 2020, No. 2-3, pp. 75-76 (in German) and the entry of beginning of June 2020 in the section "Protestantism."

June 12, 2020:

AsiaNews: Letter to parents from a school in Inner Mongolia threatens government action against students participating in religious activities

According to *AsiaNews*, a Xilinhot Middle School No. 6 "Letter to Parents," issued March 25, 2020, deals with student participation in religious activities. *AsiaNews* published the text of the letter. Initially, the letter refers to the constitution, the education law and other regulations and declares that socialist schools raise new socialist people and prohibit any form of religious activity. "No religious organization or individual may [...] recruit students in schools for religious activities. [...] Religious ideas and rituals must not be disseminated in schools or among pupils. Students in schools should not be coerced or

induced into participating in religious activities.” According to the letter, such cases should be reported to the government. Students are the future of socialism, they have to consciously accept the patriotic, collective and communist education and are not allowed to wear religious symbols, the letter said. “Parents and others must not force students to believe in a religion or participate in religious activities. The school must subject pupils who take part in religious activities to criticism and [corrective] education and, if this education does not lead to a change, hand them over to the competent government authorities for treatment.” Parents and pupils had to sign their consent to the letter (*AsiaNews* June 12). In recent years there have already been cases of similar letters to parents, for example in 2018 in schools in Henan Province (cf. *RCTC* 2018, No. 4, pp. 8-9).

July 27, 2020:

Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (PCC) holds consultation on the training of religious personnel

More patriotic religious leaders need to be trained who are “politically reliable, meritorious in their religion, morally respected and assertive at the decisive moment,” said Wang Yang, chairman of the PCC and a member of the Politburo, in his speech, quoting Xi Jinping. Eleven PCC members from religious circles, other religious representatives and experts took part in the meeting. As the *Xinhua* report went on to say, all participants agreed that ideological-political education must permeate the entire formation process. The “levels” of religious personnel should be optimized – (on the one hand) emphasis should be placed on the training of high-level religious representatives, (on the other hand) the training of religious personnel at the grassroots level should be strengthened, the report said. Greater use of the resources of the state education system in the training of religious personnel should be considered, and exchanges between religious circles abroad to broaden horizons should be supported. The competent authorities should establish a scientific and reasonable mechanism for the selection, appointment [to certain positions] and evaluation of religious personnel (*Xinhua* July 27).

A similar meeting of the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs on the contemporary interpretation of religious teachings and precepts took place on November 26, 2019 (see *RCTC* 2020, No. 1, p. 5). The Catholic governing bodies organized a session on seminary formation on August 20 (see section “Catholic Church” below).

July 27, 2020:

Shanghai Diocese: Priests presiding over funeral services at the municipal Longhua Funeral Parlor are required to show their official priest’s certificate

This means that underground priests are not allowed to use or enter the funeral home, the largest in Shanghai – wrote *UCAN*, which reported on the incident. According to *UCAN*, the government has forced the diocese to issue a circular stating that Catholic priests who preside over funeral prayers at Longhua Funeral Parlor must show their official certificate for Catholic religious personnel. The trigger was that Catholics from the underground and official communities of the diocese had attended a funeral service for an underground priest in the funeral home. *UCAN* sees the forced circular that sparked outrage in the underground as an attempt by the authorities to break the increasing unity between the official and underground community in the diocese.

Already in February, *UCAN* reported from Zhejiang that regulations for centralized burials adopted by the provincial government on December 1, 2019 stipulate that religious personnel should not attend funeral services at home and that “no more than 10 family members of the deceased may recite scriptures or sing hymns in a low voice.” According to *UCAN*, the regulations also strictly prohibit religious activities outside of (registered) religious sites which means that priests are not allowed to hold funeral services outside the church (*UCAN* Feb. 3 [according to *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Feb. 7]; Aug. 12). Funerals and mourning rituals are very important in Chinese culture as well as in the churches in China.

From August 11, 2020:

Official religious organizations respond to Xi Jinping’s appeal against food waste

On August 11, President Xi Jinping urged the population to save food, since increased vigilance with regard to securing food supplies is required in times of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The conviction that “waste is shameful, thriftiness is honorable” ought to arise throughout society. As part of this national campaign – also known as “Operation Empty Plates” – the religious affairs authorities throughout the country organized study sessions for representatives of the five religions in the weeks that followed. On August 24, the official religious organizations of the five religions in Shanghai published a joint appeal to save food, in which the motto given by Xi “Save strictly, turn against waste” (厉行节约 反对浪费) is supported by corresponding texts drawn from the Buddhist scriptures, the Qur’an and the Bible. Numerous calls on this same theme were also issued in September by organizations of religions at national and local levels.

According to *The Guardian*, China imports an estimated 20–30% of its grain needs, and in the summer severe floods in many places in China destroyed the crops. In addition, there is the African swine fever and interrupted supply chains due to the Corona pandemic. Food prices have risen sharply. The newspaper reported on actions triggered by the campaign: for example, the Wuhan Catering Industry Association called on the city’s restaurants to set up an “N-1 ordering system,” according to which a group of diners always has to order one less meal than the number of people in that group. Traditional courtesy requires “N+1” (chinacatholic.org Aug. 30; theguardian.com Aug. 13; *Xinhua* Aug. 11).

Buddhism / Tibet

May 23, 2020:

Saga Dawa: Lhasa authorities prohibit students, government employees and state pensioners from participating in religious activities

This was reported by the US broadcaster *Radio Free Asia* (*RFA*), citing local sources. Saga Dawa is the “month of merit” in Tibetan Buddhism, during which the birth, death and enlightenment of the Buddha are celebrated; it began on May 23, 2020. Parents of Tibetan schoolchildren were also asked not to allow their children to participate in religious activities during Saga Dawa (*RFA* May 26). – Similar bans during Saga Dawa had been reported in previous years.

September 22, 2020:

Study: “Military-style vocational training” and mass transfer of workers in and from Tibet

The study published by researcher Adrian Zenz at the Jamestown Foundation is based, among other things, on reports from the government authorities in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). According to Zenz, in March 2019 the TAR introduced a “2019–2020 Farmer and Pastoralist Training and Labor Transfer Action Plan.” According to a government report, the TAR trained 543,000 “surplus rural workers” in the first 7 months of this year, of whom 49,000 were transferred to other parts of the TAR and 3,109 to other parts of China. Before the job transfer, the herders and farmers undergo mandatory centralized “military-style training,” which – according to Zenz – aims to reform “backward thinking” and to “dilute the negative influence of religion” as well as to train work discipline, law and the Chinese language. According to Zenz, there are numerous elements of coercion in the system, for example during recruitment, in which the “village-based work teams,” a government program for monitoring the population (cf. *RCTC* 2016, No. 2, pp. 9-10), are involved. Since the TAR has set itself the goal of eradicating absolute poverty by the end of 2020, local authorities are under pressure to integrate poor population groups into the work transfer program. According to Zenz, there are many parallels with the compulsory vocational training and job transfer system in Xinjiang, but there are also important differences: “Presently, there is no evidence that the TAR’s scheme is linked to extrajudicial internment, and aspects of its labor transfer mechanisms are potentially less coercive” (<https://jamestown.org/program/jamestown-early-warning-brief-xinjiangs-system-of-militarized-vocational-training-comes-to-tibet>; *AsiaNews* Sept. 25, 26, 28; *Reuters* Sept. 22).

Islam / Xinjiang

June 24, 2020:

Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) cancels Hajj for 2020

In a notice to the Islamic Associations at the provincial level, the CIA wrote that although China has achieved great strategic successes in the fight against COVID-19, the virus is not under control worldwide and there are also many cases in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Hajj Ministry has therefore canceled the pilgrimage for foreign Muslims on June 22, the notice explained, and continued saying that for this reason the CIA decided to suspend the participation of the Muslims of China in the Hajj 2020 (chinaislam.net.cn June 24).

The CIA is the only state-approved organizer of Hajj for all of China.

August 9, 2020:

Statement by 76 leaders of various religions condemns the “potential genocide of the Uyghurs and other Muslims in China” as “one of the most egregious human tragedies since the Holocaust”

First-time signers include Rowan Williams, the former Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Catholic Cardinals Charles Bo of Yangon (chairman of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences) and Ignatius Suharyo of Jakarta, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, Archbishop Angaelos, a number of

senior rabbis from Great Britain, several imams, the President of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain, the representative of the Dalai Lama for Northern Europe, Poland and the Baltic States and the executive director of the British Humanists. The statement says: “At least one million Uyghurs and other Muslims in China are incarcerated in prison camps facing starvation, torture, murder, sexual violence, slave labour and forced organ extraction. Outside the camps, basic religious freedom is denied. [...] The clear aim of the Chinese authorities is to eradicate the Uyghur identity. [...] After the Holocaust, the world said ‘Never Again.’ Today, we repeat those words ‘Never Again,’ all over again.” The religious leaders call for prayer, solidarity and action so that these crimes are investigated, those responsible are brought to justice, and human dignity restored.

According to *The Tablet*, the statement by the religious leaders was preceded by two statements by high-ranking Jewish representatives in England in which the rare step on the part of the Jews was taken to draw comparisons between the Holocaust and the crimes against the Uyghurs (*The Tablet* Aug. 9; <https://zenit.org/2020/08/24/feature-chinas-persecution-of-uyghur-one-of-most-egregious-human-tragedies-since-holocaust-international-faith-leaders-denounce/>).

September 17, 2020:

China State Council publishes White Paper “Employment and Labor Rights in Xinjiang”

Xinjiang has a large impoverished population to which religious extremism has contributed, according to the White Paper. Since the 18th Party Congress in 2012, Xinjiang has “vigorously implemented employment projects, enhanced vocational training, and expanded employment channels and capacity.” Regarding vocational training, the document states that “Every year from 2014 to 2019 Xinjiang provided training sessions to an average of 1.29 million urban and rural workers, of which 451,400 were in southern Xinjiang.” As a result, the trainees would have acquired skills and qualifications with employment potential. The document mentions that the system for vocational training in Xinjiang includes “vocational education and training centers” (职业技能教育培训中心) [the official Chinese term for the re-education camps in Xinjiang, which have been set up in large numbers since 2017]. To promote employment, Xinjiang has developed “satellite factories” and “poverty alleviation workshops” to enable surplus rural workers to work near their hometowns – the White Paper continues. Since 2014, 117,000 people from Xinjiang have also found higher-income jobs in other parts of the country, where they are supported by their employers with housing, medical care, etc., the White Paper says; prior to that, they had been trained in language, law and urban living habits in accordance with market demand. According to the document, forced labor is forbidden by law, prevented and punished. The White Paper claims that labor rights are protected and that workers’ freedom of religious belief is being guaranteed. It says that people’s standard of living has noticeably improved, they are satisfied and are optimistic about the future. According to the White Paper, this refutes the “false claims” made by certain international forces that forced labor prevails in Xinjiang (http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202009/17/content_WS5f62cef6c6d0f7257693c192.html).

According to *Merics*, the White Paper was part of a larger China propaganda offensive on Xinjiang. On September 23, the US Congress passed a “Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act,” including sanctions against the Xinjiang Production and Development Corps, a state-military conglomerate and major cotton and tomato producer. The Swedish clothing company H&M also ended its collaboration with textile producers in Xinjiang.

On December 9, 2019, the chairman of the government of Xinjiang, Shohrat Zakir, announced that all “trainees” from the “vocational education and training centers” in Xinjiang have now “graduated” (*Merics China Briefing* Sept. 24; *Xinhua* Dec. 9, 2019).

September 25, 2020:

Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) launches Xinjiang Data Project Website on mosque destruction and detention centers in Xinjiang – Study on forced labor

In the project, the institute evaluates satellite images. Results can be found on the website <https://xjdp.aspi.org.au>. The Institute estimates that during the last three years around 8,450 mosques in Xinjiang have been destroyed and another 7,550 have been damaged through, for example, the demolition of domes or minarets. The figures are extrapolations from satellite analysis of 533 mosques. In addition, the ASPI mapped and analyzed 380 suspected detention centers in Xinjiang that have been newly built or expanded since 2017 (the beginning of the massive incarceration of Uyghurs and members of other ethnic groups in Xinjiang as part of “de-radicalization measures”), including new buildings and expansions in 2019 and 2020. Most of the camps are located near industrial parks, which is confirmed by reports from former detainees that many inmates of the camps were subjected to forced labor, ASPI said. Already on March 1, 2020, the report “Uyghurs for sale. ‘Re-education,’ forced labor and surveillance beyond Xinjiang” had been published by the ASPI. According to this report, between 2017 and 2019 around 80,000 Uyghurs from Xinjiang, some of them directly from re-education camps, were taken to work in factories in Chinese provinces outside Xinjiang, where, according to the ASPI, they work under conditions that suggest forced labor: they live in separate dormitories and under constant surveillance, have restricted freedom of movement, are not allowed to practice their religion, and receive language and ideology lessons outside of working hours. ASPI said that these Chinese factories [according to information on their own websites] claim to be direct or indirect suppliers of 82 international brands in the technology, clothing and automotive sectors, including German companies such as BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen, Adidas, Bosch and Siemens, but also Apple, Samsung, Nokia, Nike, Bombardier, etc.

The ASPI was founded by the Australian government and is partially financed by the Australian Ministry of Defense (aspi.org.au Sept. 25; *FAZ* Sept. 25; *LICAS* Sept. 25; www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale).

September 28, 2020:

South China Morning Post (SCMP): Religious customs of the Muslim Utsul on Hainan Island are under pressure

The Utsul are a small ethnic group of around 10,000 people who live in Sanya on the southern part of Hainan Island. As far as the state is concerned, they are counted among the Chinese-speaking Hui Muslims because of their religion, but they have their own language that is similar to Malay. The *SCMP* has obtained a “Working Document Regarding the Strengthening of Overall Governance over the Huixin and Huihui Neighborhoods.” According to the newspaper, these are the only two neighborhoods in Sanya where most residents are Utsul. The document, issued in 2019 by the local Communist Party organization, states that mosques should be downsized when being rebuilt and should not show any “Arab tendencies.” It further says that every mosque must have a party member on its administrative body. Arabic script or the Chinese characters for halal or “Islamic” should be removed from shopfronts. According to the document, party members who belong to the Utsul will be subject to investigations to ensure they are not practicing Muslims and may be prosecuted if found to be religiously observant. The hijab and the traditional long skirts of Utsul women are forbidden in schools and in the workplace, the document says.

A hijab ban imposed on schools in early September 2020 met with such resistance that it was temporarily lifted after hundreds of students refused to remove their headscarves.

Dru Gladney, an expert on Islam in China, told *France 24* that the Sunni Utsul have never shown any signs of being influenced by stricter branches of Islam such as Salafism. He said that they are the oldest Muslim community in China, their cemeteries going back to the 12th century. Katja Drinhausen from Merics told the broadcaster that the situation in Hainan was “a textbook case of the evolution of the Chinese Communist Party’s policies towards minorities under Xi Jinping;” a climate of “general suspicion” of religious belief is cultivated, even against such a peaceful tiny group as the Utsul, she said (*France 24* Sept. 30; *SCMP* Sept. 28).

Protestantism

May 3, June 11, July 22, 2020:

Police actions against Xingguang Church in Xiamen

On May 3, June 11 and July 22, gatherings of parishioners were broken up by police forces, equipment and furnishings were destroyed and raids were carried out on private homes. The community was charged with violating religious affairs regulations for refusing to register. According to various reports, there were arrests and use of violence against believers (*AsiaNews* May 5; *chinaaid.net* July 22; *csw.org.uk* June 15). *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

Beginning of June 2020:

Churches open once again

At the end of May and the beginning of June, decrees and notices throughout the country were issued in many provinces and directly controlled municipalities, which began the reopening of the Protestant churches after a four-month phase of the Corona lockdown. In Zhejiang, the representatives of the Christian Council and the Patriotic Three-Self Movement announced on May 31st an orderly restoration of Christian activities provided that they meet the requirements for carrying out preventive measures and controls in relation to the pandemic. All Protestant churches were required to teach patriotism lessons, to conduct a risk assessment and safety investigations, to draw up a catalog of controls and preventive measures, and to work out a strict emergency plan. In Jiangsu, the provincial religious authority scheduled a working meeting on May 30 to discuss necessary steps to properly restore religious activities. In Chongqing, Holy Grace Church informed its members on June 1 that the first service in the building would be held on June 7. Believers with noticeable symptoms such as fever, shivering, dry cough, etc. were told to stay away and to seek medical treatment. All participants would be required to wear masks, to give their personal details, to have their temperature checked, to sit at a distance of 1 meter from one another and to comply with general hygiene rules. Believers living near the church were advised to attend the evening service in order to reduce attendance at the two morning services (*chinachristiandaily.com* June 3).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

August 24, 2020:

China Source: Motives of Faith

In August, the Protestant website *China Source* published the results of a survey carried out by a Chinese pastor in 2017-2018. He received a good 10% of all questionnaires sent back, 1,655 filled out by believers and 110 from church leaders from 18 provinces. 72% of the participants in the survey were female (7% did not indicate their gender). With 22% university graduates, the level of education of the faithful was higher than expected. According to the analysis of the study, the majority of the community members consisted of people between the ages of 40 and 60 years. 75% of the participants came from Christian families. The most frequent answer to the question about the most important motives for one's own faith was the wish for "knowledge of the truth," followed by "salvation after death," followed by "healing experience," "God's help in life" and "the request for forgiveness of sins" (*AsiaNews* Sept. 2; www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/demographics-beyond-numbers-2).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Middle of September 2020:

New pastor for Protestant German Language Congregation in Beijing

At the end of August, Pastor Lorenz Bührmann traveled to China with his wife and, after two weeks of quarantine, began his service as head of the Protestant German Language Congregation in Beijing in mid-September. The official introduction to his office takes place on October 11 at the German Embassy, carried out by Pastor Dr. Annette Mehlhorn, Pastor Bührmann's colleague in Shanghai. Lorenz Bührmann was previously a pastor of the Berlin City Mission.

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

September 23, 2020:

Three-Self Movement celebrates 70th Anniversary

On September 23, there was an official celebration in Shanghai to mark the 70th anniversary of the Protestant Patriotic Three-Self Movement. The development of the organization has been recognized as a great success and as an historic pioneering act for Christianity around the world. It was exemplary in shaking off all foreign influences and identifying with the political goals of the state and party, it said. Now the three-self-movement would work purposefully at the service of its own society, i.e. in the realization of the "Chinese dream." A memorial service was held in the Mu'en Church in Shanghai on September 21. Celebrations of the Three-Self organizations at provincial and city level have been announced throughout the country (ccctspm.org Sept. 23). See also the report in *China heute*, No. 2-3, pp. 78-79 (in German).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

May 7, 2020:

Bishop Emeritus Joseph Zhu Baoyu of Nanyang, Henan Province, dies aged 98

Bishop Zhu was born on July 2, 1921 in Pushan, Henan Province. He lost his father at the age of six and then grew up in a Catholic orphanage in Jingang. He attended the minor seminary and studied at the regional seminary of the Archdiocese of Kaifeng. He was consecrated by Bishop Fan Xueyan of Baoding in 1957 and subsequently worked in various parishes in Nanyang. He spent many years in prison and in labor camps until he was released in 1988. Zhu Baoyu was secretly ordained Auxiliary Bishop of Nanyang on March 19, 1995, and took office as local bishop on November 23, 2002 at the age of 81 after the death of Bishop Jin Dechen. In 2010, Bishop Zhu submitted his resignation to the Holy See for reasons of age; Rome then installed Coadjutor Bishop Jin Lugang, who was secretly ordained in 2007, as his successor. However, shortly after his resignation, according to *AsiaNews*, Bishop Zhu asked – perhaps under pressure – for recognition from the government, which finally installed him as ordinary bishop in 2011. As far as the government was concerned, he continued to be the Ordinary Bishop despite his old age. From the perspective of the Holy See, however, Jin has been the local bishop and Zhu has been a bishop emeritus since 2010. On January 30, 2019, the government officially installed Bishop Peter Jin Lugang as coadjutor bishop, so that with Bishop Zhu's death, Jin is now also officially recognized as the Ordinary Bishop of Nanyang.

Bishop Zhu died in the convent of the Diocesan Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Only 40 people were allowed to attend the funeral on May 9.

In February, Bishop Zhu tested positive for the Corona virus. He was the oldest Chinese person to survive the disease at the time, which earned him an article and a video in the *Renmin Ribao*.

The diocese of Nanyang now includes around 20,000 Catholics, 20 priests and around 50 religious sisters (*AsiaNews* Jan. 30; Feb. 13, 2019; Feb. 17; May 7, 2020; *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, p. 14; *Fides* May 23, 2020; *UCAN* May 12, 2020).

June 19, 2020:

Xuanhua Underground Bishop Cui Tai arrested once again

The 70 year old Coadjutor Bishop Augustinus Cui Tai of Xuanhua, Hebei Province, has been arrested several times and has been taken to an unknown location, according to believers. He was released on January 20, 2020 in connection with the Chinese New Year and was probably allowed to stay with his family until June because of the Corona pandemic. This period, according to *AsiaNews*, was the longest period of freedom the bishop had been granted in recent years. Since 2007, Bishop Cui has been repeatedly detained in secret detention centers or hotels or placed under house arrest by the authorities without trial. Bishop Cui Tai was ordained a priest in 1990 and was appointed coadjutor bishop of Xuanhua in 2013. The Ordinary of Xuanhua, Bishop Thomas Zhao Kexun, is already 96 years old (*AsiaNews* June 23; see also *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 15-16 and 2020, No. 2, p. 13).

July 8, 2020:

AsiaNews publishes report on pressure being placed on underground Church in Yujiang Diocese, Jiangxi

The report by Pietro Jiang, a Catholic from Yujiang, said that all underground clergy in Yujiang Diocese were recently banned from preaching and carrying out Church activities. That made the situation ever worse than before, Jiang wrote. According to his report, authorities have closed many underground Church meeting places in recent years and intimidated Catholics who provided rooms for worship services. In some places the authorities have expelled underground priests and replaced them with official priests. Especially since the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement, Yujiang underground Bishop Peng Weizhao [consecrated 2014] and his priests have been increasingly pressured to register; according to Jiang, the bishop and most of his priests have so far refused. Since the official Church [which has merged the five dioceses of the province into a single diocese of Jiangxi] has its own bishop [Li Suguang, consecrated bishop of Nanchang / Jiangxi in 2010], it is unclear who would lead the Church if the official and the underground community merge. After what happened in the case of Mindong Diocese, Bishop Peng and his priests had little confidence in the authorities in this regard, Jiang said in his report (*AsiaNews* July 8).

August 20, 2020:

Meeting in Xi'an on Catholic seminary education – Plan for establishing uniform teaching programs and textbooks

More than 30 Catholic representatives with functions in the official Catholic governing bodies, including seven bishops and those responsible for the seminaries, took part in the meeting on “seminary work.” Wang Lei, directress of the Office for Institutes for Religious Education in the 11th Bureau of the Central United Front Department of the Communist Party, and a representative of Shaanxi Province “attended the meeting to direct the work.” According to Bishop Ma Yinglin, it was convened to implement the “spirit” of the consultation in the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference on July 27 (see entry in the section “Religious Policy”). Ms. Wang Lei introduced a new legal norm, “Measures for the Administration of Institutes for Religious Education,” which appears to be in the works. She called on the Catholic governing bodies – the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Bishops’ Conference – to take responsibility for the administration of the seminaries, to optimize the ideological-political education and to adhere to the direction of Sinicization. Representatives of the various seminaries presented their teaching programs and made suggestions for general textbooks. A “Plan to Promote the Construction of a Teaching Program and Common Teaching Materials for All Catholic Theological-Philosophical Seminaries (Draft)” was adopted (*chinacatholic.cn* Aug. 21).

Sino-Vatican Relations

May 24, 2020:

World Day of Prayer for the Catholic Church in China

After praying the Regina Caeli, broadcast from the library of the Apostolic Palace via multimedia, Pope Francis said: “Let us join spiritually with the Catholic faithful in China, who today celebrate with

particular devotion the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians and Patroness of China, venerated in the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. Let us entrust to the guidance and protection of our Heavenly Mother the pastors and faithful of the Catholic Church in that great country, so that they may be strong in faith and steadfast in fraternal union, joyful witnesses and promoters of charity and fraternal hope, and good citizens.”

He then continued, addressing the Chinese Catholics directly: “Dearest Catholic brothers and sisters in China, I wish to assure you that the universal Church, of which you are an integral part, shares your hopes and supports you in your trials of life. She accompanies you with prayer for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that the light and beauty of the Gospel, God’s power for the salvation of whoever believes, may shine within you. In expressing to you all once again my great and sincere affection, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing. May Our Lady keep you always!” (www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2020/documents/papa-francesco_regina-coeli_20200524.html).

In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI had designated the Feast of Mary, Help of Christians (May 24) as the World Day of Prayer for China. The pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai, mentioned by the Pope, was cancelled in 2020 due to the Corona pandemic, as were the other pilgrimages in China in the Marian month of May (cf. *China heute* 2020, No. 1, p. 4 [in German]).

June 9, 2020:

83 year old underground Bishop Lin Jiashan of Fuzhou (Fujian), consecrated bishop in 1997, was officially installed as the local ordinary on June 9, 2020

The ceremony was presided over by Bishop Cai Bingrui von Xiamen, head of the Patriotic Association of Fujian Province. A representative of the official Bishops’ Conference (until now not recognized by Rome) read the letter of approbation from the Bishops’ Conference.

According to the report on the website of the official Catholic governing bodies, the bishop pledged in his oath, “to obey God’s commandments, to fulfil the pastoral duties of a bishop, to proclaim the Gospel faithfully and to guide the priests and laity of the Diocese of Fuzhou to abide by the constitution of the country, uphold national unity and social harmony, love the country and the Church, to adhere to the orientation of the Catholic Church towards Sinicization and to contribute to the realization of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” The controversial promise to uphold the principle of the Church’s independence [from foreign powers, i.e. from the Pope in Rome] was therefore not included in his oath. However, the oath was more “political” than that contained in the official “Regulations of the Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference Regarding the Election and Consecration of Bishops” of 2012, according to which the consecration candidate only has to swear “that he will hold fast to the faith and teachings of Christ, be faithful to the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church and faithful to the mother country, abide by the constitution and the laws and serve the people.”

The situation in the Archdiocese of Fuzhou is complicated. Traditionally the underground Church is very strong but for years it has been divided. According to *AsiaNews* about 20 priests supported Bishop Lin, while another groups of around 60 priests in the underground preferred the priest Lin Yuntuan. To save the unity in the diocese, in 2007 the Vatican dismissed Bishop Lin and appointed Bishop Huang Shoucheng of the neighbouring diocese of Mindong as administrator of Fuzhou. After the death of Bishop Huang in 2016, Bishop Lin succeeded in getting the Vatican, which according to *AsiaNews* actually wanted to appoint Lin Yuntuan as administrator, to reinstate him as local bishop. According to *AsiaNews*, Bishop Lin Jiashan had for a long time wanted to formalize his relations with the authorities. Only 40 or 50 of the 100 priests of the diocese attended the installation, among them also Lin Yuntuan. Interestingly, in an interview with *UCAN* (Chinese edition), Lin Yuntuan described himself as the head

of Bishop Lin's office and said that he had already received the appointment from the Holy See as coadjutor bishop of Fuzhou. "The Pope has repeatedly stressed the need for dialogue with the government to fight for the underground Church to be able to live a normal life of faith without being oppressed," Fr. Lin Yuntuan told *UCAN*.

Bishop Lin Jiashan, born in 1936, was secretly consecrated bishop in 1997. The Archdiocese of Fuzhou is one of the largest dioceses in China, numbering around 300,000 faithful, more than 100 priests and over 500 religious Sisters (*AsiaNews* June 9; *chinacatholic.cn* June 9; *facebook.com/UCANChina* June 9; *UCAN* June 10).

On January 30, 2019, the underground Bishop Jin Lugang had been officially installed as coadjutor bishop of Nanyang (Henan) (see *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, p. 14; and the entry of May 7 in the section "Catholic Church").

June 22, 2020:

Previously not officially recognized Bishop Li Huiyuan officially installed as Bishop of Fengxiang (Shaanxi Province)

The ceremony was presided over by (Arch)Bishop Dang Mingyan of Xi'an, who is also one of the vice-presidents of the Patriotic Association of Shaanxi Province; almost all other bishops of Shaanxi attended: Bishop Tong Changping of Weinan, Bishop Wu Qinjing of Zhouzhi, Bishop Han Yingjin of Sanyuan, Bishop Xu Hongwei of Hanzhong and Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yan'an. According to *UCAN*, all the priests of Fengxiang Diocese and the parish leaders of all the parishes of the diocese were also present. The approbation of the official Bishops' Conference was read out. Bishop Li Huiyuan's oath also included – according to the report of the official Catholic governing bodies on the installation – adherence to the independence of the Church.

Under Bishop Lucas Li Jingfeng (1921–2017), Fengxiang Diocese was part of the underground Church for a long time. In 2004 Lucas Li succeeded in having himself recognized by the State without having to join the Patriotic Association. In 2011 he organized the election of Li Huiyuan (born in 1965) as his successor in a process that complied with both canon law and the electoral regulations approved by the Chinese government. Since no official consecration permission was granted, he secretly consecrated Li Huiyuan as coadjutor bishop in 2014. When Bishop Lukas Li died in 2017, Bishop Li Huiyuan became his successor, but without official recognition. In May 2019, the Patriotic Association of Baoji City, to which Fengxiang belongs, was founded and Li Huiyuan was elected as its chairman.

According to *AsiaNews*, already in the days of Mgr. Lucas Li all the priests of Fengxiang agreed not to be divided. There is also great unity with all the other dioceses of Shaanxi, which facilitates relations with provincial authorities. The Diocese of Fengxiang numbers around 20,000 Catholics, 50 priests and 200 Sisters (*AsiaNews* June 22; *chinacatholic.cn* June 22; *facebook.com/UCANChina* June 22; *UCAN* June 25).

July 9, 2020:

Underground Bishop Ma Cunguo officially installed as Bishop of Shuozhou (Shanxi Province)

The ceremony was presided over by (Arch)Bishop Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan, who is also president of the Patriotic Association of Shanxi Province; Shanxi Bishops Wu Junwei of Yuncheng and Ding Lingbin of Changzhi also attended, and the letter of approbation of the official Bishops' Conference

was read. According to *UCAN* the ceremony was kept low key and was only made known on July 13 through a report in the *Vatican Insider* which is part of the Italian *La Stampa*.

Whereas, according to a July 16 report of China's official Catholic governing bodies, Bishop Ma allegedly also promised in his oath to uphold the independence of the Church, *AsiaNews* and *UCAN* reported that Bishop Ma took an oath of his own that made no mention of independence. According to *AsiaNews* the text of the oath was circulated in the social media: “[...] I will keep God's commandments, I will fulfill the responsibilities of my episcopal office, I will proclaim the Gospel faithfully, remaining faithful to the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church, giving my life to the pastoral mission of announcing the Gospel. I will respect the teachings of the Apostle St. Peter: ‘For the sake of the Lord, accept the authority of every human institution’ [1 Peter 2:13], and I will guide the priests and faithful of the diocese to respect the Constitution and laws, to safeguard the unity of the country and social harmony, to love the country and the Church, to adhere to the orientation towards Sinicization of the Catholic Church, and to contribute to the realization of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

Bishop Ma Cunguo, born in 1971, studied at the (official) seminary of Shanxi and in 2004 was secretly consecrated as bishop at the age of only 33. He is said to have wanted official recognition for some time. The small Diocese of Shuozhou has only around 10,000 faithful and about a dozen priests and Sisters (*AsiaNews* July 18 [Chinese edition]; *chinacatholic.cn* July 16; *facebook.com/UCANChina* July 16; *UCAN* July 20; *Vatican Insider* July 13).

August 18, 2020:

Previously not officially recognized Bishop Jin Yangke officially installed as Bishop of Ningbo (Zhejiang province) – fifth such case since the Sino-Vatican agreement

The ceremony was presided over by Bishop Ma Yinglin of Kunming, president of the official Bishops' Conference; the letter of approbation of the Bishops' Conference was read. According to the report of the official Catholic governing bodies on the installation, Bishop Jin's oath also contained a commitment to the independence of the Church.

AsiaNews reports that the Diocese of Ningbo is “very united and dynamic”; Bishop Jin is described as a good pastor, loved by his faithful. Bishop Jin Yangke, born in 1958, had always belonged to the official Church, and since 1990 he worked openly as a priest in the Diocese of Ningbo. His predecessor Bishop Hu Xiande consecrated him as coadjutor bishop secretly in 2012, probably to prevent participation of an illegitimate bishop in the consecration. In 2017 Bishop Jin became president of the Patriotic Association of Ningbo. That same year, after the death of Bishop Hu Xiande, he took over the leadership of the diocese. Official recognition, however, came only now. The Diocese of Ningbo has about 30,000 faithful, 29 priests and 30 religious Sisters (*AsiaNews* August 19; *chinacatholic.cn* August 18; *facebook.com/UCANChina* August 18; *UCAN* August 19).

Thus, since the Sino-Vatican agreement of 2018, so far (as of October 15, 2020) five bishops ordained by papal appointment years ago but not officially recognized have been officially installed. If we add to these the underground Bishop Zhuang Jianjian of Shantou, who was recognised by the authorities as “bishop emeritus” on January 22, 2019, a total of six secretly consecrated bishops was officially recognised during this period. According to the Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong, at the end of 2019 there were still 31 underground bishops not recognized by the government, 16 of whom were in office.

September 10, 2020:

Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson calls implementation of the agreement “smooth,” but says nothing about renewal

At the regular press conference, a journalist from Phoenix TV asked Foreign Affairs spokesman Zhao Lijian whether he could confirm reports saying that China and the Vatican were negotiating a renewal of the 2018 agreement and that it was hoped it could be extended for two years in the coming weeks. Zhao Lijian replied: “With the concerted efforts from both sides, the interim agreement on the appointment of bishops between China and the Vatican has been implemented smoothly since it was signed nearly two years ago. Since the beginning of this year, the two sides have lent mutual support to each other amid COVID-19 pandemic, stayed committed to upholding global public health security, and accumulated greater mutual trust and consensuses through a series of positive interactions. The two sides will continue to maintain close communication and consultation and improve bilateral relations” (fmprc.gov.cn Sept. 10).

September 14, 2020:

Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin: The Agreement expires only in October, the Vatican would like to renew it *ad experimentum*; results until now were “not particularly striking”

On the margins of a lecture on 45 years of the Helsinki Final Act of the CSCE, Cardinal Parolin answered questions from some journalists about the provisional agreement with China. According to the Catholic news agency *Zenit*, the Cardinal said: “The Agreement has not yet expired,” adding that this will only happen in October, two years from when it entered into force. To the question whether it seems likely that the Agreement would be renewed Parolin responded: “Yes, I really think so, our intention is that it be prolonged, that we continue to adopt it *ad experimentum*, as has been done in these two years, in order to further verify its usefulness for the Church in China.” Asked whether he thought China is interested in renewing it, the Cardinal replied: “I think and hope so, even if these first results were not particularly striking, however, it seems that a direction has been marked that is worth continuing, then we will see at the end of this further period what to do.” He stated further: “[...] our interest is to normalize life as much as possible, so that the Church can live a normal life which for the Catholic Church is also to have relations with the Holy See and with the Pope and then that there is unity within the Chinese Church” (*Zenit* Sept. 14).

September 19 / October 1, 2020:

US Foreign Minister: Renewal of the Agreement endangers the moral authority of the Vatican – He is received by Cardinal Parolin instead of Pope Francis

Mike Pompeo on September 19 wrote on his Twitter account: “Two years ago, the Holy See reached an agreement with the Chinese Communist Party, hoping to help China’s Catholics. Yet the CCP’s abuse of the faithful has only gotten worse. The Vatican endangers its moral authority should it renew the deal.” He had made a similar statement the day before in the magazine *First Things*. When he travelled to Italy

on September 30, Pope Francis refused to receive him on the grounds that he was in the midst of the election campaign; instead, on October 1, Pompeo met Cardinal Secretary of State Parolin (*Catholic News Service* Sept. 22; *UCAN* Oct. 2).

September 22, 2020:

Second anniversary of the signing of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops

On September 22, 2018 the Under-Secretary of State for the Holy See's relations with the States, Msgr. Antoine Camilleri, and the Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Chao, signed a Provisional Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops. On the same day Pope Francis announced his decision to readmit to full ecclesial communion the last eight remaining "official" bishops (one of them posthumously) who had been consecrated without a papal mandate. The content of the agreement is unknown – according to Gerard O'Connell in *America*, the Chinese side had insisted on secrecy. As it had been leaked that the agreement had been concluded for two years, it was generally expected that it would expire on September 22, 2020. Catholics in China told *UCAN* that they were confused because by September 22 there was no news of an extension (*americamagazine.org* Sept. 15; *facebook.com/UCANChina* Sept. 22).

September 22, 2020:

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson speaks of good communication between China and the Vatican, however there was again no statement about a renewal of the Agreement

In response to the question of a journalist the foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said: "The China-Vatican provisional agreement on appointment of bishops has been working smoothly since it was reached two years ago, thanks to the concerted efforts, and Catholicism in China has witnessed sound development. The two sides will maintain close communication and consultation to continuously improve bilateral relations. There is good communication between the two sides. China holds a sincere and positive attitude towards advancing relations with the Vatican side. We welcome exchanges between the two sides with an open attitude" (*fmprc.gov.cn* Sept. 22).

September 29, 2020:

Head of Vatican media: the Provisional Agreement expires on October 22; "positive results" invite to "continue longer in its present form"

Andrea Tornielli, editor-in-chief of the Vatican media, wrote in an editorial in *Vatican News* that the Provisional Agreement on the Appointments of Bishops, "which went into effect a month later [i.e. one month after it was signed on September 22, 2018], will expire this coming 22 October. Signed in Beijing, the term of the *ad experimentum* Provisional Agreement was set for two years after which it would eventually be definitively confirmed or some other decision reached." This was the first offi-

cial indication by either party of the concrete expiry date of the Provisional Agreement. The Agreement “exclusively treats the process for the appointment of bishops,” according to Tornielli. The goal of the Agreement, therefore, “was always genuinely pastoral,” namely, “to permit the Catholic faithful to have bishops in full communion with the Successor of Peter who are at the same time recognized by the authorities of the People’s Republic of China.” The first two years, according to Tornielli, “led to new episcopal appointments with Rome’s agreement, some of which were officially recognized by the government in Beijing. Even though contact was blocked in recent months due to the pandemic, the results have been positive, although limited.” They suggest “going forward with the application of the Agreement in its present form for another determined period of time” (vaticannews.va Sept. 29).

October 4, 2020:

Auxiliary Bishop Guo Xijin of Mindong announces his resignation



Bishop Guo Xijin giving a talk. This photo was taken a few years ago, it circulates in various networks, e.g. in *AsiaNews* and *UCAN*.

Before the signing of the provisional Sino-Vatican agreement on the appointment of bishops, Bishop Guo (born in 1958) was the ordinary bishop of Mindong Diocese, though not recognised by the government, leading the large underground community of the diocese of over 80,000 faithful and 57 priests, whereas at that time only about 4,000 faithful and 8 priests belonged to the official part of the diocese, which was led by the still illegitimate Bishop Zhan Silu. At Rome’s request, Bishop Guo agreed to submit as an auxiliary bishop with his priests to the now legitimate Bishop Zhan who

had been appointed diocesan bishop by the Pope. On April 18, 2019, the two bishops and all the priests of Mindong Diocese celebrated the Chrism Mass together. However, after continued pressure by the authorities on underground priests to sign a declaration in support of the Church’s independence, Auxiliary Bishop Guo withdrew his application for state recognition in May 2019. On September 1, 2020, once again an underground priest of the diocese, Liu Maochun, was taken away by the authorities for 17 days in order to force him to join the official Church, as all but 20 priests of the underground clergy of Mindong had already done by then.

On October 4, 2020, Auxiliary Bishop Guo Xijin declared his resignation from office and his retreat into a life of prayer (see the English translation of his letter of resignation at www.asianews.it/news-en/Bishop-Guo-Xijin:-I-resign-because-I-am-incompetent-and-not-in-step-with-the-times-51217.html). Perhaps he had also hoped for more clarifying support from Rome in this situation. In his letter of resignation, however, he makes it clear that he does not question the Pope’s decision to make Bishop Zhan head of the diocese and that all priests of the diocese validly administer the sacraments.

Mindong was considered a pilot project for the implementation of the agreement on the appointment of bishops (*AsiaNews* Sept. 17, 18; Oct. 5). Cf. *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 11-12; 16; No. 3, p. 13; No. 4, p. 13; 2020, No. 1, p. 10; No. 2, pp. 13-14.

Hong Kong

June 1, 2020:

Resumption of Holy Mass in Hong Kong

Due to the Corona pandemic, public Holy Masses were not allowed to be celebrated in Hong Kong's Catholic churches from February 15 to May 31. From June 1 onwards, the faithful were allowed to participate in weekday Masses and from June 7 onwards in Sunday Masses. However, due to rising infection rates, services were again suspended from July 15 to October 1. From October 2, weekday Masses were again celebrated in public, and from October 4, Sunday Masses. This is done under strict hygiene measures and with only half the normal number of participants. When entering the churches, the faithful must wear face masks, have their temperature measured and disinfect their hands. Only hand communion is permitted (catholic.org.hk; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* May 22; *UCAN* June 2; July 29).

June 4, 2020:

In spite of the prohibition, rallies were held in remembrance of the Tian'anmen massacre

Although the police had banned gatherings of more than eight people for "health reasons," thousands of people flocked to Victoria Park on the evening of June 4 to commemorate during the traditional vigil the victims of the Tian'anmen Square massacre in Beijing on June 4, 1989. Rallies were also held in many other places in Hong Kong. Lee Cheuk-yan, President of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, which arranges the annual memorial, said that it did not just concern the past but also the future of Hong Kong. In the park people sat together in groups of eight. The police mainly held back. This year there were especially many young persons and students there; in recent years they had drifted away from the Victoria Park vigil, arguing that the organizers should direct the focus more on the situation in Hong Kong. To Lee this was a sign of renewed unity of purpose in the call for democracy in China as in Hong Kong. In seven Catholic churches holy Masses were celebrated that evening in memory of the dead; one of the Masses was presided by Auxiliary Bishop Ha (cf. his homily in the documentation of this number) (*AsiaNews* June 5; Aug. 7).

July 1, 2020:

National Security Law comes into force

On June 30 the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was adopted. It entered into force on 1 July and was annexed to the Hong Kong Basic Law. It was written without the participation of the political institutions or the people of Hong Kong and was adopted unanimously by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in Beijing. In its 66 articles, the Hong Kong Security Law thus introduces the crimes of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces to endanger China's national security. The law had already caused great concern among pro-democracy forces in Hong Kong in the run-up to the event, as there were fears that it would further undermine the autonomy of the Special Administrative Region and that any opposition could potentially be criminalised. An Office for Safe-

guarding National Security set up by Beijing in Hong Kong and ranked above local jurisdiction has the power to implement the new law.

Since the Security Law came into force, a number of arrests of journalists, political activists and businessmen have apparently been made in connection with the Security Law, including Jimmy Lai, founder of the opposition newspaper *Apple Daily*, Martin Lee, founder of the Democratic Party, Lee Cheuk-yan, co-founder of the Labour Party. On September 24, Joshua Wong, the best-known face of the Hong Kong democracy movement, was also briefly arrested, but was released on bail after his arrest.

As Fr. Gianni Criveller PIME, who has lived in Hong Kong for many years, writes (see his article “Hong Kong Taken Over by the National Security Law” in this issue of *RCTC*), ecclesial communities and religions could come into direct focus at a later time “after Beijing has secured control of the nerve centres of the city.”

In Hong Kong Cardinals John Tong and Joseph Zen gave different verdicts on the Security Law. In an interview with the diocesan magazine *Kung Kao Po* at the end of June, Cardinal Tong said that the National Security Law would not harm religious freedom, nor the right of the Church to speak out on social issues. At the same time, he called on Beijing and the local government to address the concerns of the Hong Kong people. Regarding relations with the Vatican, Cardinal Tong said: “The Hong Kong Catholic Church has always had a direct relationship with the Vatican; the relationship between the Hong Kong diocese and the Vatican should be regarded as an internal matter” and not as “collusion with foreign forces.” Cardinal Zen, on the other hand, expressed concern. “The National Security Law [...] cannot completely guarantee true religious freedom. [...] I have no confidence,” said the cardinal in a video on Facebook. Freedom of religion also means that no government involvement is needed in the handling of the affairs of the Church, he added (*AsiaNews* June 24; July 3; *focus.de* Sept. 24; *LICAS* July 1; *tagesschau.de* June 30).

July 5, 2020:

Journalists: In his Angelus address, Pope Francis planned to include words on Hong Kong, but did not deliver them

As several journalists revealed, the manuscript of the Pope’s message after the Angelus Prayer, distributed to journalists under embargo about an hour earlier, contained a passage on Hong Kong that Pope Francis did not deliver. According to the journalist Marco Tosatti – without Vatican confirmation however – that passage reads: “Recently, I have followed with particular attention and not without concern the development of the complex situation in Hong Kong, and I wish to show above all my heartfelt closeness to all the inhabitants of that territory.” The topics were sensitive in the current context and he hoped, “that all the people involved will know how to face the various problems with a spirit of far-sighted wisdom and authentic dialogue. This requires courage, humility, non-violence, and respect for the dignity and rights of all. I thus express the desire that societal freedom, and especially religious freedom, be expressed in full and true liberty, as indeed various international documents provide for it. I accompany with my constant prayer the entire Catholic community and all people of good will in Hong Kong.”

While some journalists suspected that behind the incident Beijing was “gagging” the Pope, others saw it as an indirect way of expressing concern about Hong Kong without offending Beijing (*marcotosatti.com* July 5; *South China Morning Post* July 9).

September 21, 2020:

In his pastoral letter, Cardinal Tong calls for unity

In the pastoral letter dated September 21, 2020 entitled “In Communion with the Church,” the Apostolic Administrator of Hong Kong Diocese, Cardinal John Tong, denounced “with pastoral solicitude” some negative attitudes which have also found their way into Church circles, thus causing division, such as justification of violence, slander and rejection of dissenters without willingness to dialogue and reconciliation. Even if, as everywhere else, there may be different views on social and political issues among the faithful, these should not lead to a division in the Church. In harsh words, Cardinal Tong also opposed the supposed “right” of Catholics to publicly criticise the Church or even to “slander” Church leaders. This too, he said, creates division in the Church. The laity should “obey and duly respect their pastors” (*Lumen Gentium*). To Catholics, who look gloomily to the future, he calls for a deeper faith in God. In September the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese also issued a “Prayer for Hong Kong Society and the Church.”

The pastoral letter led to controversial discussions in the diocese, some wondered whether the letter was really written by Cardinal Tong, as it did not correspond to his earlier, rather moderate style of writing, they thought.

Cardinal Tong had written further pastoral letters on July 29 and August 28. The first was a family letter on the Corona pandemic, the second went to the priests and deacons of the diocese. In it the Cardinal wrote, among other things, that priests and faithful have a prophetic role and that it is sometimes necessary to point out social problems in the sermon. However, the purpose of the sermon was not to convey personal views, e.g. on political issues. Attacking someone through insinuations, inciting hatred or social unrest was contrary to the spirit of Christ and inappropriate in the liturgy. According to Cardinal Tong, the faithful expect consoling, constructive and encouraging words in today’s critical situation. Priests and deacons should pay careful attention to their words and deeds both in and outside of Mass. This letter also aroused opposition among some clerics (*Apple Daily* Aug. 28; *CNA* Sept. 1; facebook.com/UCANChina Sept. 25; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* July 31; <https://catholic.org.hk/en/pastoralletter-in-communion-with-the-church/>).

October 1, 2020:

Cardinal Zen may not give mooncakes to prisoners

Since according to statements of the prison authorities distributing mooncakes constitutes a “political activity,” Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun of Hong Kong could not distribute the traditional mooncakes at the Mid-Autumn Festival to prisoners this year. Since 2010 the Cardinal has made that gesture, and in 2013 the campaign was even sponsored by Pope Francis. The Cardinal collects donations for it every year. The social media discussed whether the prohibition was connected to the National Security Law that came into force for Hong Kong on July 1, 2020 (*AsiaNews* Sept. 10).

Taiwan

May 4, 2020:

Catholic Churches open again in the Archdiocese of Taipei

After 45 days of lockdown, according to *AsiaNews*, public worship services will be held again in the Archdiocese of Taipei from 4 May, subject to conditions. According to regulations, not more than 100

faithful may participate in a Mass, they have to register, allow for a temperature check, disinfect their hands and keep the required distance from one another in the church. Taiwan has so far come through the pandemic relatively unscathed thanks to prevention and early and consistent protection measures (*AsiaNews* May 5).

July 18, 2020:

New Archbishop of Taipei installed in office

The new Archbishop Thomas Chung An-zu was installed in office on July 18 at Chung Mei Hall in Fu Jen Catholic University. Some 1,000 people, including representatives of other faiths and government officials, attended the ceremony. Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen was also present; at the end she gave a talk in which she praised the contribution of the Church to society and the fruitful work up till then of the new Archbishop with the youth. In Church circles the presence of the President was seen as a political sign towards Mainland China.

The 68-year-old Archbishop Chung is the eighth Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Taipei, succeeding Archbishop John Hung Shan-chuan SVD, who resigned on May 23 because of age. Chung told *UCAN* that his appointment would not have a major impact on relations between China, Taiwan and the Vatican. The Vatican continued to be concerned about relations with Taiwan, with no vacancy for the episcopate in Taipei, and the Holy See's Taipei Chargé d'Affaires, Mgr Arnaldo Catalan, had visited him before leaving Chiayi to learn about the situation of the Church. "I can assure you that the Vatican's relations with Taiwan will develop normally," said Chung.

Archbishop Chung was born in 1952 in Yunlin and ordained priest in the diocese of Tainan in 1981. He gained a doctoral degree in moral theology in Rome. In 2006 he was made auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Taipei and in 2008 Bishop of Chiayi. In addition, he was a member of the board of Fu Jen Catholic University and Rector of the Regional Seminary of Taiwan. On July 8, 2020 Archbishop Chung was named as a member of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. Up till the present he was actively involved in ecclesial contacts with Buddhists, Daoists and the representatives of other religions and is a member of the Committee for Interreligious Dialogue of the Taiwan Regional Bishops' Conference (*Fides* May 23; *Taipei Times* July 20; *UCAN* May 26; July 22).

September 1, 2020:

Taiwan: More Suicides among the youth

The number of suicides among young people in Taipei has risen rapidly over the past two years due to mental health problems, the Taipei Department of Health reported in late August. Whereas last year 339 people voluntarily ended their lives in the city, a decrease of ten percent compared to 2018, the number of 15–24 years olds rose from 17 to 28, an increase of 64.7 percent. The Taipei Centre for Suicide Prevention cited mental problems (36.3 percent), difficulties within the family and in love relationships (32.9 percent) as well as school problems (10.7 percent) as reasons for suicide among young people. The mayor of Taipei, Ko Wen-je, told the *Taipei Times* on 1 September 2020 that many people find it too embarrassing to see a doctor if they have emotional problems or thoughts of suicide. He said that depression could be treated very well with medication – and psychotherapy (*Taipei Times*, Sept. 1).

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