

News Update on Religion and Church in China September 10 – December 4, 2021

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The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2021, No. 4, pp. 3-20) covered the period June 17 – October 25, 2021.

Politics

November 11, 2021:

CPC Central Committee adopts “Resolution on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century”

So far, in the 100 years of the CPC’s existence, there have only been two such resolutions on party history: in 1945 under Mao Zedong’s party leadership and after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1981 in the Deng Xiaoping era. A good half of the text of the current resolution is dedicated to the “new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics” starting from the 18th party congress in 2012 (at which Xi Jinping took over the leadership of the party). The resolution with the Chinese title 中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议 can be found in an official English translation at www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202111/16/WS6193a693a310cdd39bc75b43.html.

Xi Jinping aims to be re-elected as general secretary of the party in autumn 2022. In the spring of 2023, due to a constitutional amendment, he can also be elected president for the third time.

Religious Policy

November 24, 2021:

Yunnan Province adopts Regulations on Religious Affairs with paragraphs on minors and religion – Two provinces legally prohibit religious summer camps for minors

As far as is known, there is no legal basis in national legal norms for the increasing local bans on minors entering religious sites and attending religious courses. The national Regulations on Religious Affairs

do not contain any provisions on minors. In the meantime, however, provisions have been included in the local Regulations on Religious Affairs of five provinces, most recently in Yunnan Province. Article 35 of the Regulations on Religious Affairs of Yunnan Province says: “No organization and no individual may organize, induce or force minors to take part in religious activities.” This sentence in the same or a similar wording can be found also in the Regulations on Religious Affairs of Qinghai (adopted in 2021, Article 49), Shanxi (2020, Article 23), Hubei (2019, Article 42) and Guizhou (2019, Article 40). The Qinghai and Shanxi Regulations on Religious Affairs in the said articles further contain the sentence: “It is forbidden to spread religion among minors by organizing study trips (研学旅行), summer camps (夏令营), retreats (修行营), etc.”

This means that, for the first time, in legal norms on the provincial level, we see provisions that explicitly restrict the religious education of minors and give the authorities the opportunity to take action against the participation of children and young people in community religious life. Xinjiang is in a unique position, in that children and young people have not been allowed to enter mosques, churches, etc. for many years. In the Regulations on Religious Affairs of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of 2014 (Article 37) it is explicitly stated: “Minors are not allowed to participate in religious activities.”

Sources: Regulations on Religious Affairs of Yunnan Province 云南省宗教事务条例 at www.sara.gov.cn/flfg/363527.jhtml; Regulations on Religious Affairs of Qinghai Province 青海省宗教事务条例 at www.sara.gov.cn/flfg/358584.jhtml; Regulations on Religious Affairs of Shanxi Province 山西省宗教事务条例 at www.sara.gov.cn/flfg/331750.jhtml; Regulations on Religious Affairs of Hubei Province 湖北省宗教事务条例 at www.sara.gov.cn/flfg/321060.jhtml; Regulations on Religious Affairs of Guizhou Province 贵州省宗教事务条例 at www.sara.gov.cn/flfg/320400.jhtml. For more information and sources, see the article in *China heute* 2021, No. 4, pp. 207-210 (in German).

December 3–4, 2021:

National Conference on Religious Work with a programmatic speech by Xi Jinping

The last high-level religious-political summit of this kind of the party and state leadership took place five years ago (April 22-23, 2016). At that time, too, Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping gave a speech in which, among other things, he finally established the perseverance in the orientation of religions towards Sinicization as a core concept of the party’s religious policy (cf. *RCTC* 2016, No. 3, p. 7) – with great effects, as we know today. His speech at the 2021 Religious Conference is (as in 2016) only available in a summary from *Xinhua*. The differences, compared to 2016, are not apparent at first glance. Below are some points from the speech (comments in square brackets).

Much of the fundamentals have remained, such as the demand for the Sinicization of religions, which is mentioned seven times in the text and was also strongly emphasized by the Chinese state media in the reporting on the conference, and the adaptation of religions to socialist society. The policy of freedom of religious belief is also continued. Sinicization is one of the “nine musts” (九个必须) that the Chinese media discovered in Xi’s speech. It is associated with the term “identification” (认同), which was not mentioned in the 2016 speech: “Deepen the Sinicization of the religions of our country, [...] increase the identification of personalities from religious circles and the masses of religious believers with the great fatherland, Chinese nation and culture, the CCP and socialism with Chinese characteristics,” Xi Jinping said, according to *Xinhua*. [“Identification” here is a clearly more exacting requirement than “adaptation,” as it affects the inner attitude.]

“The system and the mechanisms of religious work must be perfected” so that “the party leads, the government administers, society cooperates [协同] and the religions control themselves [自律],” says Xi. Elsewhere in Xi’s speech it says: “The religious circles must be supported and guided to strengthen self-education, self-management and self-restraint [自我约束].” The terms “self-control” and “self-re-

straint” are also new. [This obviously means that the official religious organizations should be set up and controlled by the authorities in such a way that they have the religious communities under control of the party.] In the “self-construction” of religious organizations, the „system of democratic supervision” of their leaders must be improved. [New provisions for the supervision and regular assessment of religious personnel by religious organizations can be found in the “Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel” of 2021].

The old “principle of independence” of religions [from foreign powers] is linked directly to the question of national security in Xi’s 2021 speech: “We must adhere to the overall concept of national security [总体国家安全观], the principle of independence, autonomy and self-administration and promote related work in an integrated way.”

Also new in 2021 is that in Xi’s demand for the training of reliable personnel, not only are party and government cadres and religious representatives mentioned, but also experts in the field of religious studies as a third group: “We must train a team of religious studies scholars who are firm in ideology and politics, adhere to the Marxist view of religion, have an excellent academic style and are good at innovation in order to strengthen the development of the subject of Marxist religious studies.” [In China, departments of religious studies at state-run research facilities have the role of a think tank for political deciders, at the same time they sometimes maintain or maintained good relationships with the religions they researched.]

The long-term effects of this National Conference on Religious Work will have to be seen in the future, especially since it remains unknown which specific resolutions were taken internally in the two days of the meeting. The *Xinhua* rendition of Xi’s speech can be found in *Renmin ribao* (Dec. 4) at <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2021/1204/c1024-32299688.html>, and an edited short version of *Xinhua* at www.sara.gov.cn/zsjyw/363970.jhtml.

Religions in General

November 3, 2021:

***Bitter Winter*: In the first three quarters of 2021, 600 members of the Church of the Almighty God were sentenced to prison terms**

Bitter Winter, a news website on religious liberty and human rights in China run by CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions) in Turin, often reports on the “Church of the Almighty God” which is forbidden and suppressed as a “cult” (*xiejiao* 邪教) in the PRC and which now also operates internationally. According to a report on the website dated November 3, in the course of the year 2021 until September, 600 members of the group were sentenced to prison terms across China, including 237 in Shandong Province alone. For these figures, *Bitter Winter* referred to its own sources in China and court rulings. On September 25, 2021, the People’s Court of Zhangqiu in Shandong opened a trial against 48 members of the Church who had already been arrested in 2019; they were sentenced to prison terms of two, three or more years, the website said. *Bitter Winter* also reported cases in which even ordinary members had been sentenced to terms of seven years or more. According to the portal, the Central Commission for Political and Legal Affairs ordered a three-year nationwide crackdown campaign against the Church of the Almighty God in September 2020 (bitterwinter.org 12/30/2020; 11/3).

Daoism

October 20, 2021:

***Guangming ribao* publishes contribution “Dialogue of Cultures – 200 years of German translations of the *Daodejing*”**

Every fourth German owns a copy of the *Laozi* (*Daodejing*) – writes Zhu Yubo in the party-affiliated newspaper *Guangming ribao*. According to Zhu, who refers to Knut Walf’s *Bibliography of Western Taoism* (2010), there are 104 German translations of the *Laozi* – second in number only to the English translations. The first German partial translation from a French version was done in 1827 by the philosopher Carl J.H. Windischmann, the first complete German translation is by Viktor Strauss (1870). Zhu describes strategies of adaptation to the local German (and Christian) context by the translators Strauss and Richard Wilhelm, as well as the influence of the philosophical ideas of the *Laozi* on German writers such as Alfred Döblin, Bertolt Brecht or Hermann Hesse. German philosophy has dealt even more with the *Laozi*, Zhu says. He speaks of a negative attitude by Kant, a critical reception by Hegel, Schelling and Martin Buber up to the great appreciation of *Laozi* by Heidegger and Jaspers. “The Chinese classics, as representative symbols of Chinese civilization, are an important tool to ‘tell the story of China well’ to the world,” writes Zhu Yubo at the end of his long contribution. The history of the German *Laozi* translation has many successes, but also many inconsistencies with the original *Laozi*, Zhu says. He postulates that in view of this, the Chinese academic world must first grasp the power of discourse, raise its own voice and actively tell the “Chinese story.” Second, the foreign translations should be thoroughly researched in order to draw theoretical and practical lessons for new translations and revisions.

Zhu Yubo is a lecturer at PLA Information Engineering University and a postdoctoral fellow at Shanghai Foreign Language University. He heads the project “Translation and Dissemination of *Laozi* in Germany and its Echo in Dialogue with German Philosophy” of the National Social Science Fund (*Guangming Daily* Oct. 20 as found at www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=7326&p=%27p%27).

Buddhism

October 29, 2021:

Chinese Buddhist Association publishes “Code of Conduct for Buddhist Religious Personnel”

The document was approved by the Chinese Buddhist Association’s Board of Directors on September 14, 2021. It is intended – as it says in the document – to standardize the behavior of Buddhist religious personnel and is based, among other things, on the state “Regulations on Religious Affairs” and “Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel” [the latter contain the provision that the religious organizations must establish rules of conduct for their religious personnel].

The new official code of conduct for Buddhist monks and nuns comprises five points: First, patriotism, observance of the law, support of the leadership of the CPC and the socialist system, etc., as well as Sinitization and adaptation to the socialist society [i.e., politically correct behavior]. Second, “taking the vows as a teacher.” Among other things, this paragraph calls for the prevention of personality cults and spiritual control as well as the commercialization of Buddhism. Inauguration rituals for non-religious sites and objects as well as competition, extravagance and pomp are to be avoided. Third, morning and evening recitation, fasting and scripture study are to be cultivated. The interpretation of the latter should be based on the socialist core values as a guideline in accordance with the progress of the times

and the excellent culture of China. Fourth, promoting unity and inclusion of the individual in the monastic community. Fifth, serve society and benefit all sentient beings, practice the spirit of humanistic Buddhism.

The text of the “Code of Conduct for Buddhist Religious Personnel” 佛教教职人员行为守则 can be found at www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=509&id=44078, a comic version is to be found at https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzI5MzA1MjI0Ng==&mid=2651588959&idx=1&sn=4b6afe02f714718c310f4aacb6505c8b&chksm=f780a366c0f72a70d6b0e7eb3b1805e9c1b55baa2f0c699411b90383323727b9ff05bc0a1f48&token=1650.

On the one hand, the code of conduct is heavily influenced by demands from politics; other points, such as prevention of personality cult and spiritual control, are likely to be based on inner-Buddhist experiences. So far, the official umbrella organizations of Muslims (Jan. 7 / June 12, 2019), Protestants (Sept. 23, 2019, German translation in *China heute* 2019, No. 4, pp. 227-228) and Daoists (Nov. 27, 2020) all have released codes of conducts for their religious personnel; those of the Catholics are still pending.

November 5, 2021:

Radio Free Asia (RFA) reports on the expulsion of underage monks from Tibetan monasteries in Qinghai

According to the *RFA*, this happened as a result of the Qinghai Provincial Regulations on Religious Affairs, which came into force on October 1, 2021 (see the entry of November 24, 2021 in the section “Religious Policy”). Subsequently, monks between the ages of 11 and 15 were expelled from Dhitsa Monastery, according to a local source quoted by *RFA*. Young monks from Jakhung Monastery and other monasteries in Qinghai have also been sent home. Government officials would now inspect the monasteries to make sure regulations are being implemented, the source said, adding that the total number of young monks expelled so far is still unknown. The *RFA* report noted that three years ago the authorities in Sichuan Province began to remove teenage monks from Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and to send them to government schools (rfa.org/english Nov. 5; rfa.org/mandarin Nov. 12).

November 19, 2021:

Ten years of the Tibetan Buddhist Academy in Lhasa – a “contribution to the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism”

The state news agency *China News Service (CNS)* reported on the tenth anniversary of the Tibetan Buddhist Academy 西藏佛学院 in Lhasa. The head of the academy, the 7th Drukhang Rinpoche Thubten Khedrup, one of the vice-chairs of the Chinese Buddhist Association, told *CNS* that the academy had produced over 1,300 graduates and trained 2,640 monks and nuns for the monasteries of the Tibet Autonomous Region over the past 10 years. The academy follows “integrative thinking” and has students and teachers from the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Thubten Khedrup said. Monks and nuns are taught together. According to the *CNS* report, an “innovative training” for young Living Buddhas is practiced in a separate class, combining Buddhist education with nine years of compulsory schooling. The ratio of general education to Buddhist teaching content is 8:2 or 7:3. In 2020, the first 6 Living Buddhas graduated from junior middle school, and there are currently 9 students in the class for young Living Buddhas. According to the *CNS*, Dan Ke, chairman of the United Front Department of the Tibet Autonomous Region, praised the academy’s “great contribution to the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism” in his address at the anniversary celebration (chinanews.com.cn Nov. 19).

The reincarnations of Tibetan religious teachers (Tibetan *tulku*, Chin. *huofo* 活佛, “Living Buddha”) are usually identified and enthroned as toddlers. To control this process, the State Administration for Religious Affairs issued “Measures for the Administration of Reincarnations of Living Buddhas of Tibetan Buddhism” in 2007 (cf. *China heute* 2007, No. 6, pp. 220-221, 226-229 [in German]).

Islam

October 15-19, 2021:

Guangzhou Islamic Association provides services at Canton Fair

During the 130th Canton Fair, a service group from the Islamic Association of Guangzhou, headed by Imam Wang Wenjie, the chairman of the association, offered religious services to 500 Muslim exhibitors from all over the world and organized the supply of *halal* food and drinks to the fair guests. This was praised by the Muslim guests, it conveyed a good image of China and contributed to the security and stability of the fair – said the report of the Islamic Association of Guangdong on the website chinaislam.net.cn (Nov. 4). Due to the corona pandemic, the fair took place as a hybrid event online and offline in the Pazhou Exhibition Center in Guangzhou. The Canton Fair, which has existed since 1957, is China’s largest import and export fair.

Protestant Churches

November 17-19, 2021:

Community leaders and members of the Qingcaodi Reformed Church arrested

Several parishioners from the unregistered Qingcaodi Reformed Church (青草地归正教会) were arrested and questioned in Deyang City, Sichuan Province. These were the former leader of the community, Hao Ming, the current community leader, Wu Jiannan, and a few other active members, including the wives of the two mentioned above and the sister of Elder Hao Ming. While most of the respondents were released that same day, Hao Ming and Wu Jiannan were charged with fraud (诈骗罪) after being detained for 48 hours. In 2018, the former community elder signed the open Joint Statement on behalf of the Qingcaodi Reformed Church in which several hundred unregistered churches protested against the tightening of religious legislation and defended their existence as legal (English translation of this statement at <https://www.facebook.com/earlyraincovenantchurch/posts/a-joint-statement-by-pastors-a-declaration-for-the-sake-of-the-christian-faith-4t/281309142595959/>). It is believed that Hao Ming’s closeness to the author of the statement, Rev. Wang Yi, and his involvement in the anti-government Early Rainbow Covenant Church are behind the measures taken against parishioners. Both communities were classified as illegal organizations by the competent authority of the Sichuan Province in March 2021 (chinaaid.net Nov. 30).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

November 21, 2021:

House church members arrested in Shanxi for “illegally crossing borders”

Preacher An Yankui and Mr. Zhang Chenghao were arrested on November 21 by local police in Fenyang City, Shanxi Province, on charges of illegally crossing the border. They both belong to the Reformed Church of Zion (郇诚归正教会), and, according to reports from China Aid, have both been repeatedly arrested and their homes searched by the authorities. When the two men went to their homes after the service, they found officers ransacking their personal records and confiscating cell phones, computers and other electronic devices. On December 1, the wives of those arrested went to the police station to visit their husbands and recover the confiscated items, both of their requests were refused. Preacher An's lawyer was also not given access to his client – all “due to ongoing investigations.” An Yankui and Zhang Chenghao had traveled to Malaysia where they attended a Christian meeting. According to information from their relatives, they did so with regular passports and visas (chinaaid.org Dec. 1; cncivilrights.com Nov. 28).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Beginning of December 2021:

German language community in Beijing before the Winter Olympics

The Chinese authorities are reacting to the ongoing global Corona pandemic in the run-up to the Winter Olympics, which will take place in Beijing and the surrounding area at the beginning of February, with tightened restrictions on freedom of movement and travel in the country. Today, companies are rarely sending employees on business trips; you can only travel to Beijing if you can present a PCR test that is no more than 48 hours old. “Larger events such as concerts and the German Ball have been canceled,” reports Lorenz Bührmann, pastor of the German-language Protestant Community in Beijing. After a long preparation, the German Charity Christmas Bazaar was canceled at relatively short notice on November 19. There is great uncertainty as to which events will still be allowed to take place in Beijing.

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

September 10, 2021:

Fuyin shibao reports on demolition of Kunming Cathedral

As can be seen from a number of media reports, the Catholic Cathedral of Kunming is currently in the process of being torn down or has already been torn down. As *Fuyin shibao* (*Gospel Times*) wrote on September 10, the Panlong District City Council of Kunming published a public “Tender for Demolition and Improvement Work on an Unauthorized Building at 418-436 Beijing Road,” the location where the cathedral and related buildings – i.e., the bishopric and seat of the Patriotic Association of the City of Kunming and the Catholic “Two Associations” of Yunnan Province – are located. The Sacred Heart Church, as the cathedral is called, is said to have responded to the online report on September 10. After that, the church, which had been built in 1935, due to dilapidation was torn down and rebuilt in 2009. When the new church was rebuilt in its original location, illegal construction work was carried

out due to negligence on the part of the church administration. The church is now, thus the response, working actively with the relevant government agencies to rectify the situation in accordance with the law. In addition, a place had been chosen where the church would be rebuilt (Haidong Road in Guandu District). This church is already close to completion, it said. All this in the report by *Fuyin Shibao*. In the case of the church that is currently being demolished – with its dome reminiscent of St. Peter's basilica in Rome and which is a tourist attraction in Kunming – the grand staircase was torn down and the entrance fenced off at the beginning of 2020, obviously to make the church inaccessible. According to another source, only the church, but not the associated buildings, is to be demolished. What else is behind the demolition and whether this is not also or primarily for religious-political reasons cannot be inferred from the reports. The Bishop of Kunming, Bishop Ma Yinglin, is also chairman of the Chinese Bishops' Conference and one of the seven illegitimate bishops recognized by the Pope in 2018. As early as 2017, the Chinese edition of *UCAN* reported that there had been problematic property speculations and irregularities in the construction project of the Diocese of Kunming (chinaucanews.com Dec. 7, 2017; *UCAN* Feb. 4, 2019; <https://finance.sina.com.cn/tech/2021-09-07/doc-iktzscyx2862735.shtml>; gospeltimes.cn Oct. 9; @kunmingpanlong July 9).

October 26, 2021:

Fifteenth event in the Campaign series “100 Sermons” for Sinicization in Shandong

As has become clear from a number of reports, an action called “100 sermons” was and is apparently still being carried out by the official Church authorities in the course of increased Sinicization of the Catholic Church in various places in Shandong Province. The start was on May 28, in the run-up to the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party on July 1, 2021, in the courtyard of the Tuyu Church in Zichuan District, Zibo City, Zhoucun Diocese. As could be read on the official website chinacatholic.cn at the time, the aim is to actively promote the “process of the Sinicization of Catholicism in our province and to [further] inspire the great enthusiasm of the majority of priests and believers for the love of the party, the country and socialism.” Local Bishop Yang Yongqiang, Vice President of the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference and Chairman of the Provincial Catholic Commission for Church Affairs, presided over the event. About 50 people attended, including members of the Provincial “Two Associations” (Patriotic Association and Church Affairs Commission) as well as community leaders. As Bishop Yang pointed out, in recent years he has organized preaching competitions, symposiums, seminars, study courses, essays, painting and calligraphy exhibitions for priests, sisters and lay people. Today the action “Sermons in the sense of Sinicization” would start. The creation of a Sinicized theology is a long-term task, the bishop said.

Since then there has been a number of similar events. According to a report by the Bishops' Conference – according to *UCAN* on October 5 – the aim of the events is “to explain President Xi's instructions on religious activities, to promote the Sinicization of the Church and to adapt to socialist society.”

On August 25, the “100 Sermons” campaign took place in Liaocheng City, again with Bishop Yang, and on September 24 in Zibo City, this time in two churches. Around 30 church members and priests are said to have participated in the program at Zhangdian Church in Zibo, in which, among others, Bishop Yang again gave a speech.

According to a report by *Xinde*, the Shandong Provincial “Two Associations” held the fifteenth “100 Sermons” event on Sinicization this year in the conference room of the Qingdao Bishop's House on October 26. The meeting was hosted by Bishop Chen Tianhao of Qingdao. Qingdao City Patriotic Association Vice Chairman Feng Shijie gave a lecture on “Using the Fruits of the Holy Spirit to Realize Core Socialist Values.” “For a Christian, practicing core socialist values and obeying the Ten Commandments of God, implementing the fruits of the Holy Spirit and practicing the eight beatitudes are

complementary,” the report said (*UCAN* Oct. 5; *chinacatholic.cn* May 31; *xinde.org* Aug. 27, Sept. 27, Oct. 29).

November 11, 2021:

Bishop Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou, Zhejiang, was released

The 58-year-old Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin had been taken on October 25 to an undisclosed location by officials. Local officials are said to have announced at the time that this was done for “tourist” reasons. According to *UCAN*, this was the sixth time since the death of his predecessor, Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifang in 2016, that Bishop Shao has been abducted by authorities. Bishop Shao had been appointed by the Vatican as coadjutor bishop and had taken over the leadership of the diocese after the death of Bishop Zhu. So far he has not been recognized as a bishop by the Chinese government. Exactly on which day Bishop Shao was released is not entirely clear, according to a report by *AsiaNews* from November 11 (*AsiaNews* Nov. 11; *UCAN* Oct. 27, Nov. 12; see also *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, pp. 11-12 and 2021, No. 4, p. 17).

Hong Kong

October 25, 2021:

Amnesty International closes its offices in Hong Kong

Amnesty International announced on its website that the human rights organization will close its two offices in Hong Kong by the end of the year. The local ‘section’ office would cease operations on 31 October while the regional office – which is part of Amnesty’s global International Secretariat – was due to close by the end of 2021. Regional operations would be moved to the organization’s other offices in the Asia-Pacific. “This decision, made with a heavy heart, has been driven by Hong Kong’s national security law, which has made it effectively impossible for human rights organizations in Hong Kong to work freely and without fear of serious reprisals from the government,” said Anjhula Mya Singh Bais, chair of Amnesty’s International Board. “Hong Kong has long been an ideal regional base for international civil society organizations, but the recent targeting of local human rights and trade union groups signals an intensification of the authorities’ campaign to rid the city of all dissenting voices. It is increasingly difficult for us to keep operating in such an unstable environment.” The text on the website says that Amnesty documented the rapid deterioration of human rights in Hong Kong one year after the enactment of the national security law in a June 2021 briefing. “The pattern of raids, arrests and prosecutions against perceived opponents has highlighted how the vagueness of the law can be manipulated to build a case against whomsoever the authorities choose. A government crackdown targeting activists, opposition politicians and independent media has recently expanded to include civil society organizations. At least 35 groups have disbanded since the law was enacted, including some of the city’s largest unions and activist groups” (www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/amnesty-international-to-close-its-hong-kong-offices Oct. 25).

November 25, 2021:

Hong Kong libraries remove books critical of the government

According to a report by *Radio Free Asia*, public libraries in Hong Kong have “quietly” taken books from their shelves which they judge to be politically sensitive under the new national security law.

Since July 1, 2020, more than 100 titles are believed to have been removed from the Hong Kong network of public libraries, including many relating to the massacre on Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989. Books by the oppositionist Joshua Wong are also said to be no longer represented, as are publications about *Apple Daily* and its founder Jimmy Lai. Some books had to be removed under pressure from the government (*LICAS* Nov. 25).

December 4, 2021:

Jesuit Fr. Stephen Chow ordained as new Bishop of Hong Kong



Bishop Stephen Chow Sau-yan SJ.
Photo: www.catholic.org.hk.

Stephen Chow Sau-yan SJ 周守仁 was ordained Bishop of the Diocese of Hong Kong on December 4 in the Hong Kong Cathedral. With the ordination of the 62-year-old, an almost three-year vacancy comes to an end. The previous administrator of the diocese, Cardinal John Tong, was the main consecrator, and co-consecrators were Cardinal Joseph Zen, SDB, and Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha, OFM. Five hundred and fifty people gathered in the cathedral, many of them priests. Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carry Lam was also present.

In his speech at the end of the liturgical celebration, Bishop Chow emphasized that it was his desire to “be a bridge between the government and the Church in HK, and between the Catholic Church, fellow Christian denominations, and other religions.” A giraffe is depicted on the episcopal coat of arms. According to the website of the Diocese of Hong Kong, the long neck of the giraffe “allows it to have a vista with a wide horizon and a far-reaching vision” (*LICAS / Catholic News Agency* Oct. 27; *Sunday Examiner* Oct.

13, Dec. 2; *UCAN* Dec. 6; <https://catholic.org.hk/en/media-20211204/>; <https://catholic.org.hk/en/the-episcopal-coat-of-arms/>; see also www.china-zentrum.de/en/article/stephen-chow-zum-neuen-bischof-von-hongkong-geweiht-3).

December 4, 2021:

Bishop Overbeck of Hong Kong's sister diocese in Essen congratulates Bishop Chow on his ordination

In his congratulatory letter, Bishop Overbeck, who was unable to attend the consecration in person due to the pandemic, referred to Hong Kong's special role in the relationship between China and the Catholic Church. The ordination “will not only be accompanied by many pastoral tasks that affect your specific diocese, but above all your gaze will also be directed towards China.” Bishop Overbeck emphasized: “As your predecessors have already done, you too will bear responsibility for this special relationship between China and the Holy See, mediated by the Diocese of Hong Kong.” He referred to “the will of Pope Francis, to strengthen the presence of the Catholic Church in all of China,” and wished Chow “a happy hand and God's abundant blessings in everything.” The partnership between the Dioceses of

Essen and Hong Kong has existed since 1961. Initially, it was mainly financial support for the Diocese of Hong Kong. In recent years there have been reciprocal visits and encounters between young people from both dioceses (www.bistum-essen.de/pressemenue/artikel/overbeck-gratuliert-hongkonger-bischof-stephen-chow-zur-weihe).

Macau

November 2021:

Fr. Stephen Tong, SJ, of Macau is the new Provincial Superior of the Jesuits' Chinese Province

58-year-old Fr. Stephen Tong succeeds Fr. Stephen Chow, who was appointed by Pope Francis as the new Bishop of Hong Kong on May 17 and was ordained a bishop on December 4 in Hong Kong (see the entries of December 4 above). The province covers Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and mainland China. Father Tong was born in Macau in 1963 and grew up there in a non-Catholic family as the youngest son of five siblings. He completed his elementary and secondary education in Macau and was baptized before flying to Taiwan in 1981 to study civil engineering. Following the example of his eldest sister, he began to reflect on religious life and in 1990 decided to join the Society of Jesus. He entered the novitiate in Singapore and studied philosophy in Manila. He studied theology at the Holy Spirit Seminary College in Hong Kong. He spent two years in Boston to obtain a licentiate in theology. He was ordained a priest on June 24, 2000 in Macau. He then worked mainly in the training and education sector of the Jesuits, first in Manila, then in Hong Kong. Father Tong has been the superior of the Hong Kong Jesuit Community since 2012. "The region's new head is a local person familiar with the region's politics and culture," said *UCAN* (*America Magazine* Oct. 4; *UCAN* Oct. 6).

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